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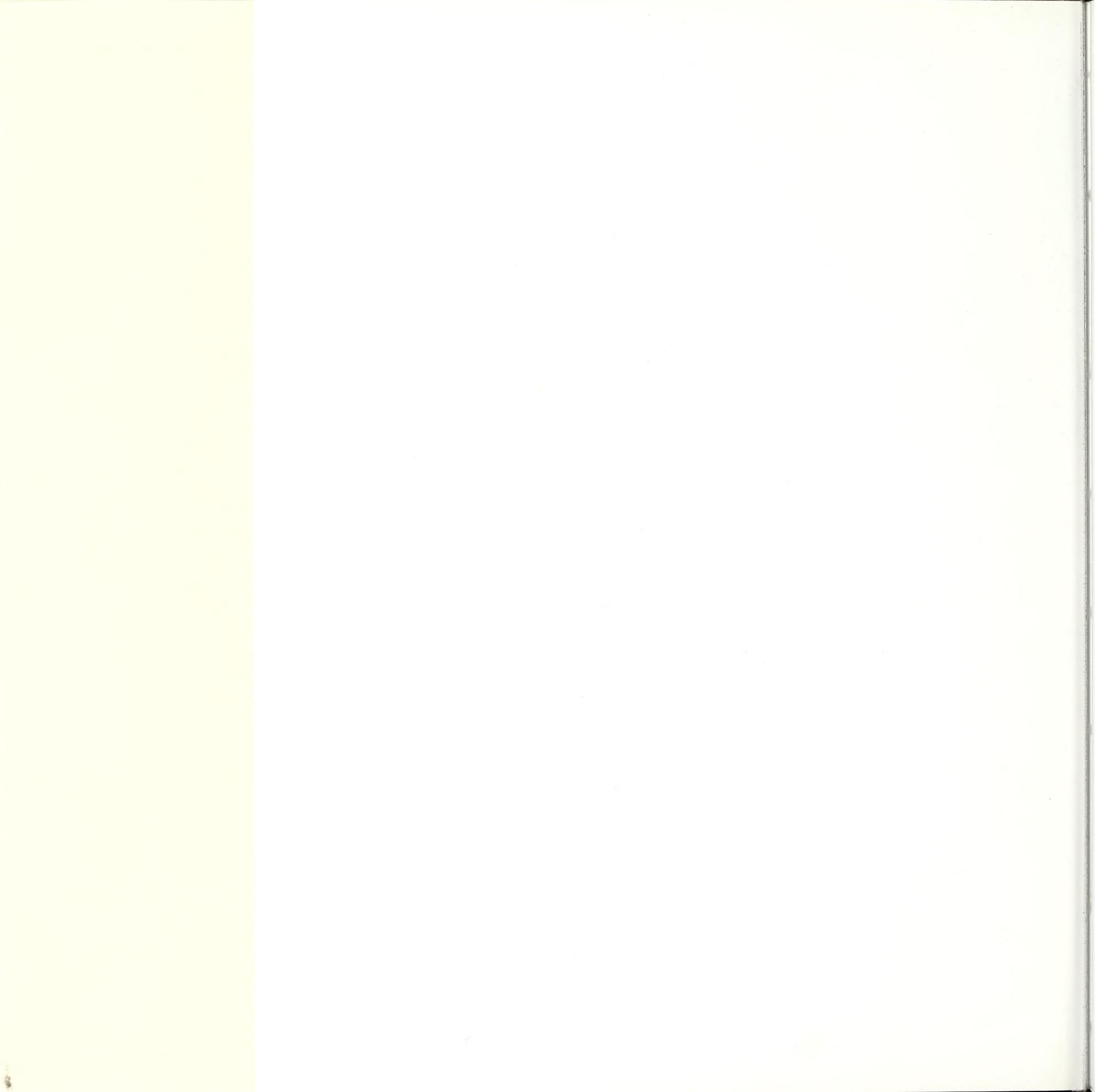




P'an Ku



P'an Ku



# P'an Ku



## Correction

"Mad Lady", which appears on page 36 of the spring issue, while submitted as an original work, is an altered version of a photograph in *Photoshop 7, Down and Dirty Tricks*, published by New Riders Publishing, copyright 2002.

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## Cover

The Portal to a Faery Fortress

*Larissa Nash*

## Graphics

Gates

*Louis Orsini*



## *Leap of Mirrored Faith*



*Jayder E. Lebolo*

*Black and White Photography*

## *I Turn And It Begins*

a locked door at the end of a hallway  
a broken key dead at my feet  
but all i hear is the screaming  
a voice dying inside of my head  
i don???t feel safe  
in this prison built around me  
my restraining order against the world  
seeing things less clearly  
as i weave through my torrid past  
palms tracing the concrete that surrounds me  
feeling its grooves fluttering under my skin  
the pulse of its soul entraps me  
feeding this feeling inside  
the pace of the world devours me  
i turn and it begins

*Amy Rodgers*

## *The Quest*

No one walks  
the shadows without  
a certain fear of  
light. No one seeks  
enlightenment without  
a certain understanding  
of the sea upon  
which she  
sails.

I seek the desert  
alone, arm in  
arm with my  
companions, twilight  
swirls of mist who  
seek their  
personal destinies  
with me, the  
girl without  
Sight, she whose  
gods blessed  
her with  
Insight. No one  
may stand beneath  
the trees without  
gifts such as  
mine, and my loss  
becomes my  
understanding.

I seek the desert, armed  
with the wisdom  
of the sea, fearing  
the light and my  
own perfect  
Shadow. I stand  
beneath the trees  
without Sight, but  
such a loss  
transcends understanding  
as I walk arm  
in arm with my  
companions, twilight warriors  
who gaze into misleading  
light prisms without  
stumbling over the  
shadows which  
reveal the canyons  
of the  
desert.

*Larissa Nash*



# The Old Seaman

Most morning beach strollers, who caught a glimpse of him, assumed that he was insane.

Day after day, he'd sit alone, staring at the thundering waves of the restless sea through the dingy glass windows on the back porch of his cluttered home.

Every so often he'd pause to fix a warm cup of coffee. But like a soldier at his post, he'd return to his old worn-out chair, to gaze, once again, at the waves of the sea rolling in upon the endless seashore.

Seagulls would often visit him and soar amidst the green palm trees grown thick around his secluded property.

As he glanced away from the sea momentarily, his hazy eyes landed upon a row of broken steps, which led away from his back door to the side of his moderate abode. They were concrete steps the old fisherman hadn't walked on in months.

Weeds peeked up from the cracks of each step like thin fingers that waved at him with every gentle breeze. He took another sip from his freshly brewed coffee and diverted his glance elsewhere.

The aroma of the coffee wafted throughout the room. As he leaned back in his chair, he savored the peace and tranquility of his home. On a good day, several sea vessels would appear, sailing over the vast horizon. The ships reminded him of a time when he robbed the ocean of its finest catch. But those were the days of his past, when the sea wasn't so unmerciful. Yet, the sea lives on with an eternal fury, forever teeming with life.

Without warning, distinct taps were heard. Small stones pelted the windows of his private fortress. Off to the right, three teenagers, two boys and one girl, threw the stones at the home to torment the old observer.

As he placed his tin coffee cup upon a small table nearby, he rubbed his dark-hued hands through his wooly white hair. In his mind he pondered a way to regain his peace, his privacy, his only solitude.

The jeers from the youngsters continued. He finally stood to his feet and shuffled over to the back door. He twisted the dusty lock until it clicked, then pulled the door open. Spider webs sagged downward as he pushed them off to one side. He stepped out of his reclusive perch, into the bright rays of the warm sun. Each sunbeam peeked from between the leaves of the swaying palm tree as if to hide from him.

Even the seagulls were startled, for they never saw the old man take such daring actions before.

As the teenagers stood there and wondered what he would do next, the old man simply pointed his withered finger at them. He squinted his wrinkled eyes in anger, saying, "Come

here you three. Don't bother running away because I know each of your parents. Come over here. I've got something very important to tell you," he said.

Reluctantly, the youngsters approached the old man. He sat down on the white beach sand with his legs extended outward.

*My boat capsized. All that I loved and cherished was lost at sea, forever.*

"Please, sit down here a minute or two with me and hear my story," said the aged fisherman.

The teenagers realized that there was no harm in spending a few minutes with the old man, so they sat before him in the sand with their legs folded beneath them. He began to tell them his story about the merciless sea.

"I know that you three youngsters probably wonder why I am often seen sitting near my window, gazing at the sea," he said as he pointed at the glistening waters. "Out there is where I lost the best thing that I ever had in the whole world. On June ninth of last year, I took my boat out to do a little deep-sea fishing. Most times I ventured out by myself, just me, and the sea. But on this one particular day, I begged my wife to go out with me. Daisy was more than just my wife; she was my other half, my soul mate. Without her, I feel like I'm only half of a man. You see; Daisy was a God-fearing woman, unlike me. Her Lord, perhaps, warned her not to go out with me on that dreadful day. However, for my sake, she went. Although she had a bad feeling about going, not one cloud was in the sky, so the only thing I had on my mind was fishing, no matter what. Hours later, the storm appeared out of nowhere. My little fishing boat was tossed about like a feather in a whirlwind. We both held onto the boat, and each other, the best we could. Even the thunder and lightning was fierce that day. Then it happened," said the old man, using his hand to play out the movement of his sea vessel.

"My boat capsized. All that I loved and cherished was lost at sea, forever. My Daisy was gone...Now I'm sitting here alone, trying to make sense of it all. When you young people disturbed my only peace by throwing rocks at the windows of my home, I knew that you didn't know my story...Now that you know, perhaps you'll have a little more compassion and let me rest in peace. My home and the sea are the only two things that remind me of my

Daisy," the old man finished, dropping his head. Tears trickled from his eyes down his wrinkled face. Each tear vanished within the winding curls of his snow-white beard.

The teenagers looked at each other. They felt somewhat ashamed of their inconsiderate actions. One by one, they tossed the remaining stones in the palm of their hands down into the sand. But one of the young boys struggled to understand how an old man survived such a terrible storm at sea. How could he survive the towering waves that tossed his tiny boat about like a grain of sand in a sandstorm?

Unable to contain his curiosity any longer, he ventured out and asked, "Sir, but how did you survive the terrible storm and your wife did not?"

Hearing this, the old man lifted his head and diverted his blank stare towards the young man as he gently whispered, "Who said that I survived?"

*Etheridge G. Lovett*

## *Old Seaman*



L1377

*Etheridge G. Lovett*

*Pencil*



## *Atlantis*

If the exuberance of the heavens  
could be arrested—  
ocular  
I'd know them  
as they stare me down  
from up high.

Am I saying his eyes  
are filled with stars?

Yes.

He is a walking cliché  
and I ~~love~~ him that way.

It's just his lips  
are more constant than  
fossils hewn in  
sandy dusty rose-colored glass  
where I eye his gaze  
Shovel-like and  
digging  
to my depths.

If skin were stone  
he'd excavate me  
he'd spy my inner kingdom  
my throne,  
crystal, silver and bone,  
that holds the orb of my desperation  
squeezing syrups  
thumping through the subway—  
the underground  
that ties him to my toes.

*Jaysen Elsky*

*Sophia*



*Jairo Peña*

*Pencil on Paper*

## *God Juracan*

Like the Taino Indians  
I come following in a dream  
At the sound of your voice  
I close my eyes and follow  
To the sounds of the Rainforest  
I respond  
The sound of running, clear, unpolluted waters  
The perfume of the gardenias  
I cannot forget  
I am not afraid of the clap of thunder  
I bring you my small offerings  
And I hope that you are pleased

*Gladys Leach*



## *Thank You for Your Precious Time*

It can be your friend or your worst enemy  
You will only see, think, become what it wants you to  
You will confuse love for hate and be wrong completely  
Devils—plain and simply  
They possess me  
Slither in easily  
And proceed  
To use  
Me  
\*

Flesh and blood, dome to bone  
My mind their own  
Their plan into action  
Misery and confusion  
Their satisfaction  
Hate and pain  
Only a fraction  
Suffering and sorrow  
A bonus addition  
True pleasure we find  
When controlling your mind  
\*

The battle is for time  
The energy lost in minutes wasted  
Bloodshed tasted  
When you fight for a moment we win  
Your time  
Better spent on thoughts of peace  
Not me  
Contemplation, Damnation, Salvation  
Faith can't face it  
More wasted time  
Ignorance is bliss  
\*

The moment of truth is upon us  
Mind, body, soul: Revolution  
Stop the wheels from turning  
Slow the speed of motion  
Resonate within the thought that comes to the forefront of your mind  
Hold it...  
Stop...  
Hold it...  
Relax...  
Hold it...  
Concentrate...  
\*

This is meditation  
Purposely hesitate  
Patiently wait  
Penetrate...  
Breathe...  
Elevate...  
Focus...  
You are now awake  
Set free  
Welcome  
To inner peace. Serenity. Enlightenment.  
Walk with me  
Bask in my energy  
\*

Now ask yourself  
How did I lose this battle to a demon like myself?  
Another casualty  
Never believe a thing  
You read, hear, see  
Don't trust your heart  
I control that too  
I rule  
Always have, always will  
Reign supreme!  
Listen to me  
Trust me  
Love  
Me  
\*

BELIEVE IN THE  
TRICKERY  
\*

By  
The Demon Within

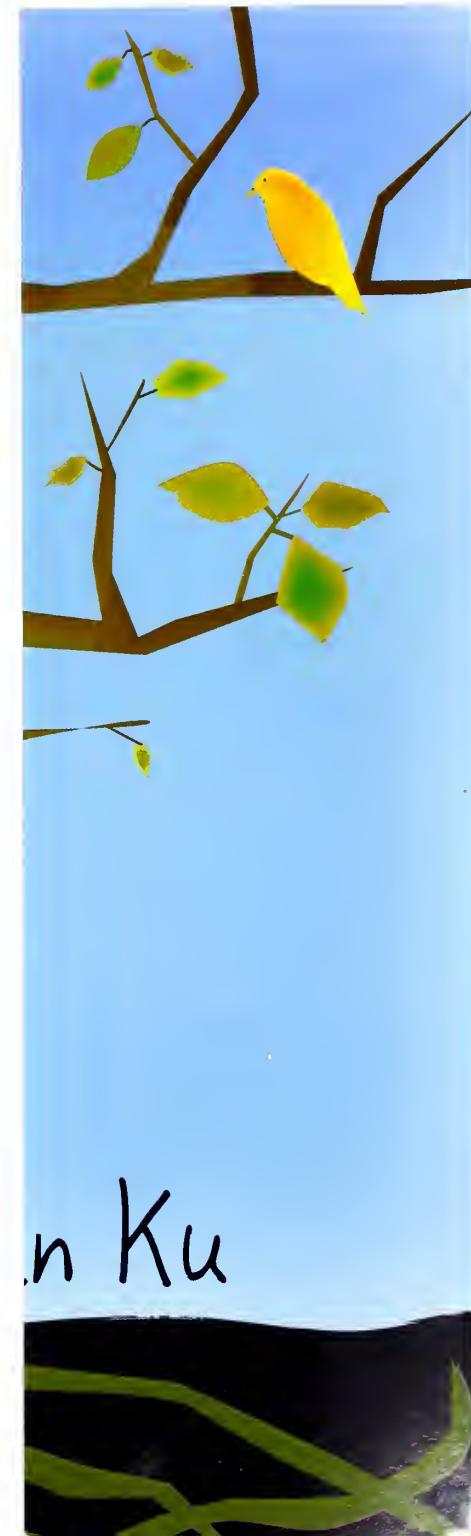
*Ian Dozier*



*Patricia L.*

*Portrait*

*Typography*



*n Ku*

*Black and White*



*Walter Aleman*

*White and Black*



*2-D Cut-Out*



*n Ku*

## *The Virus in the Jelly Jar*

Scott threatened again to unscrew the lid. "This is a virus, you know. Opening it could kill us all..."

Scott was talking out his ass. He hadn't tested his virus and had no idea what it could actually do. Yet, he was pretty certain it would end life on Earth as we know it.

Mrs. Butler frowned. "Scott, you're interrupting the lesson. Please get back to your seat."

Scott went back to his seat. He liked Mrs. Butler, but wished she was more impressed with his ability to destroy mankind.

Melissa poked him in the back and Scott turned around.

"Is that really a virus?" She asked.

He nodded.

"I don't believe you," she said. "Open it."

"You want us all to die?" Scott asked.

"You're pretty stupid."

Melissa reached for the jar. "Give it to me. I'll open it."

"No way," Scott hissed, clutching the jar close to him.

Melissa got out of her seat and tried wrestling Scott for the jar. Just then, Mrs. Butler turned around. "Melissa! What are you doing?"

"Scott has a virus," Melissa said.

Mrs. Butler frowned. "Get off his lap and back to your desk. We still have a lot of material to cover if everyone's to pass the FCAT."

Melissa sat back at her desk and Scott kind of missed having her so close. Mrs. Butler returned to teaching the lesson and Scott tried to pay attention, but kept checking the lid on his jar, making certain it stayed tight. Scott being distracted kept distracting Mrs. Butler and she didn't like it.

"Scott," she asked, "do I need to put that on my desk?"

"No, Mrs. Butler," Scott said.

"Good," she said. "Please pay attention. The test is tomorrow."

Scott stared ahead at the board, but the jar beckoned. He put it on the floor by his feet, but then Melissa knocked it over with her toe and began rolling it toward her. Scott grabbed it, falling out of his chair.

"Scott," Mrs. Butler said sternly, "please put that jar on my desk."

Melissa snickered.

"I could open it," Scott threatened.

"Scott, please just put it on my desk. I'm really trying to teach this lesson."

Scott brought the jar to the front of the classroom and put it on Mrs. Butler's desk.

"Thank you," she said and he went back to his seat.

Scott rehearsed in his mind what he'd tell Mrs. Butler when she asked him about the virus after class. He'd say how he'd taken a throat culture exactly like the doctor, except with his toothbrush. Then, how he'd scrubbed it onto a hard-boiled egg, submerged it in water and hid it between his mattress and box spring. Later, he'd crushed up his leftover penicillin and added it, a little more each Saturday, to get the strep used to it.

Two months later, he caught strep again. He took another culture and scrubbed the egg with it. This time, he was prescribed amoxicillin. He saved the last six and fed it to his jar, a sprinkle at a time.

A month later, he caught it again. This time he got Cephlin. He added it to the mix. Then there was Gentimiacin. He set aside half of that prescription. Gentimiacin was his favorite. Since a side affect was hearing loss (it said so right on the bottle), Scott could ignore his mother when she gave him chores.

Then he caught strep again.

"Remember when I was out because of my tonsils?" Scott would ask, and Mrs. Butler would nod in complete fascination.

After his tonsils were removed, Scott played with his virus in other ways. He

brought it into the bath with him. He named it.

Mrs. Butler didn't ask about the virus. Scott waited for her to, but she didn't. She seemed more interested in erasing the chalkboard. Scott retrieved it from her desk and left for his next class.

In the hall, Melissa pushed into him, asked, "Well, are you going to open it?"

"Maybe," Scott said, "if I get really mad."

"Open it. I dare you."

"I don't want to," Scott said.

"You won't open it. You're chicken." "I'm not mad."

"If I spit on you, you'll be mad."

"I'll spit on you back," Scott said.

They went to Math.

"Is that your lunch?" Coach Daleville asked. He was being sarcastic. The egg was half dissolved and covered in mold. It was obviously not something anyone would eat.

"It's my virus," Scott said.

"I see," he said and went back to teaching Math. He was putting a word problem on the board. It described the point spread for betting on the Buccaneers – Rams game.

Coach Daleville was also the Gym teacher, so his examples often had to do with sports.

"My virus could destroy the world," Scott said.

Coach Daleville grinned and erased the board. He began a new problem, "If Mr. Albrecht's virus infected the class and spread to an average of fifteen people per person per day, with each infected person continuing to infect others, how many people would be infected by the end of the year?"

He began working the problem on the board. Melissa raised her hand.

"Miss Palmieri?"

"Maybe Scott's virus kills people

faster," she suggested. "We could die in a day."

"Good point," Coach Daleville said. "Once infected, we may not survive a whole year. Mr. Albrecht, about how long does your virus take to kill a person?"

Scott shrugged his shoulders. "Two weeks?"

"Good. Two weeks." Coach Daleville went back to working the problem on the board with no input from the students, nor did he seem to expect any.

The answer was an enormous number.

"Still want me to open it?" Scott asked Melissa after class.

"I dare you," she said.

Scott shook his head. "You're stupid," he told her.

In Art, he painted a face on the jar and a skull and crossbones on the lid.

"What's that?" Mrs. Nash asked. "Is it one of those eggs you get in Home-Ec to care for like it's your baby? If so, you should probably wait to have kids."

"It's my virus," Scott said.

"Oh," Mrs. Nash said, and went back to teaching Art.

Mr. Shapiro, the Science teacher, held the jar up to the light.

"That's supposed to be a virus," Melissa said.

"It is a virus," Scott said.

"Technically, it's a fungus," Mr. Shapiro said, "though it still sounds like bad news. Don't open it."

He gave Scott back the jar.

"You should get rid of it," Mr. Shapiro said.

"Should he flush it down the toilet?"

Melissa asked. "If he throws it in the garbage, won't it break in the truck?"

Mr. Shapiro thought about it, "When you're ready to get rid of it, bring it to me. I'll take it to BCC to be incinerated."



"Okay," Scott said.

"I still think you should open it," Melissa whispered as Mr. Shapiro walked away.

"You're stupid," he said, hoping she'd wrestle him again. He shook the jar in front of her face, taunting her to grab for it.

She did and got it.

Bill got it from her and they played Monkey in the Middle with Scott as the monkey.

"Stop it!" Scott said. "You'll break it!"

Melissa threw the jar over his head. Bill pitched it just past Scott's ear. Melissa tossed it too high and bumped the cardboard ceiling. Bill had long arms and fast reflexes.

Mr. Shapiro didn't notice any of this. He wouldn't have noticed a whale if it came skate-boarding through the classroom.

Scott grabbed Melissa and held her arms. Once he had her, he wasn't sure what to do with her. Her face so close to his made him feel flush.

"I got you," he said. Melissa was breathing fast.

"What's in here anyway?" the boy behind him asked.

Scott forgot Melissa entirely. "No! Don't open it!"

Bill was shaking it like a can of soda. Scott grabbed for it, but Bill was taller and held it high above his head.

Scott kicked him in the knee and caught the jar as it came toppling forward. He was checking the lid when Bill punched him in the chest. Scott gasped.

It felt like being unplugged.

He held onto the jar.

Melissa jumped onto Bill's back and wrapped him in a full nelson. Bill shook her off while Scott realized what had happened.

With the entirely wrong part of his fist, he punched Bill in the face. Bill looked surprised and punched Scott back.

Scott's nose splattered into a paintball

of blood.

Mr. Shapiro was absorbed with the slide projector, trying to make those darn slides of the Everglades field trip display right side up.

Now it was Scott's turn to react. He swung wildly. Both boys' eyes stayed shut the entire time. When it was finished, Bill was crying and Scott wasn't, so Scott technically won the fight. Melissa had the virus and asked if he was okay.

Scott nodded; his nose ached. He didn't ask for the jar and Melissa didn't try to open it. It remained safely on her desk throughout the slide presentation.

Their next class was P.E., and they walked to it together. Scott stopped by the bathroom to clean up and Melissa waited for him in the hall. A girl asked her if she and Scott were going out. Another listened anxiously for the answer.

"Yes," Melissa said, and the girls went away. Scott came out of the bathroom.

They held hands in the bleachers during roll call and pretended it was not hot on the muggy, November afternoon. When Coach Daleville got to Scott's name, he asked how the virus was doing.

"I gave it to Mr. Shapiro," Scott said. "He's going to take it to BCC so they can incinerate it."

"I'm sure we're all very grateful," Coach Daleville said.

"Yeah," Scott said, looking over at Melissa. "I guess we are."

*Justin Dubin*



*Austin Humberson*

## Typography



## *How Could You So Easily Have Gone?*

The yellow orb has found the western edge.  
Day to night in solemn silence slips  
As darkness on my heart does softly sit  
And gently as it has often done  
Reminds me of the passing of my own  
What sorrow forms these dry rivulets  
That run through conscience and the soul  
Which in some sad way pass for tears  
Not shed in time for sight but like  
The blood of martyrs ghosting yet the years  
That I could not hold the tide of fate  
To bid you stay and make the last of days  
A worthwhile memory of the life  
Time to say adieu and clasp within  
The hand the strength of youthful years  
I could not tell you then what you had been  
What you will ever be how hope was bottled  
By your moving on to silent nights and days  
Time gave you not your full account fearful  
Perhaps that had he not struck unawares you  
Would be yet and master of his state  
But this he could not know nor ever sought how  
I was left dry and burdened dust with fears  
Guilty of those that none may know except  
The ones too full of leaves to see the pruning blades  
Yet full memory remains salving with its touch  
The bitter wound wakening pictures of done deeds  
Sweet things so out of place with this sad time  
Dear childhood and its dreams when it was your feet  
Ridden proudly backwards raised higher  
Than my peers searching vainly for their walk  
Into the air rare and beautiful as Adamís  
No serpent dared beguile these gates  
No ice giants envious of our paradise  
Only time and its one memory open to the mind  
I am sorry father for the tears I did not shed

*Ira Claxton*

*Self Portrait*



*Dedra Leyou*

*Ink Wash*



*in Ku*

*The Tree Goddess*



*Elena Paredes*

*Negative Positive Space*

## *Periodic gloom*

I'm crying.  
Tear after tear falls.  
One after the other in artless synchronization.  
Seemingly amorphous.  
Void of substance. Clear as a new crystal cut.  
Clean and surprisingly pure as it falls to the dregs of this tarnished soul.  
I was alive once. But time holds too many surprises  
That constantly jump out at you, while hidden under the debris of the withered parts of your soul.  
It is alive. Moving through the obsolete grave of my soul.  
It surpasses the corpse of my heart. It endures the never-ending feelings trapped there.  
It too is crying. It cries for the release of its torture, while yet it tortures me.  
It cries for a sense of hope.  
A place of comfort and serenity.  
Tranquility. Calmness.  
But that's not there.  
So they spend their life searching for that ideal place.  
Pity they don't know.  
They don't know that their life will end before they reach their dream destination.  
Slowly, they die.  
They go through periods of confusion.  
Periods of despair.  
Periods of disdain and frivolity.  
Finally they recognize their fate.  
Lost hope.  
The end of an all too treacherous yet effervescent lifestyle.  
It's done. It has passed away.  
  
But slowly I die.  
Like the tears I was so brave to shed.  
Slowly I rot after periodic turbulences.  
And then I'll go.  
To that boundless, sleepless doom.  
Periodic gloom.

*Samantha March*



*in Ku*

*Out of the Light*



*Tamar McLean*

*Black and White Photography*

## *The Lost Children of the Mother Ship*

The collective unconscious  
denies my existence, but  
for the most part

(we)

the misinformed

bury our time capsules  
within the womb  
of the mastermind who  
erases the memories  
of

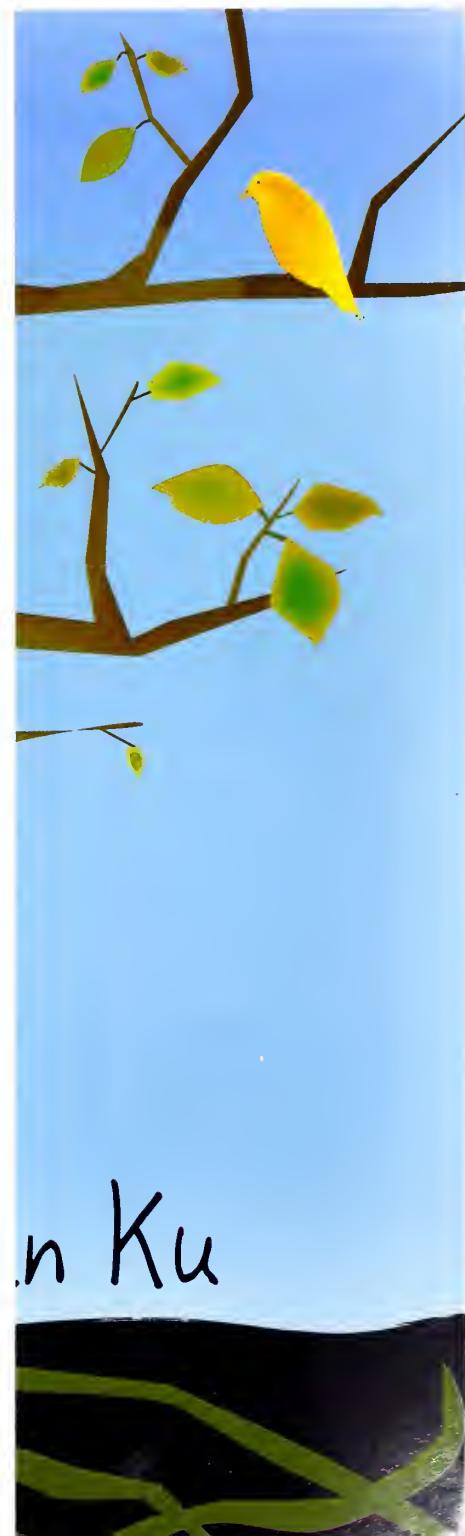
(our) curious race.

The birth canal  
leads to a secret  
tunnel, (I can see the light!)  
but the truth lies buried

underground, undisturbed.

In truth, we do not  
exist.

*Larissa Nash*



## *World Domination Dot Org*

longing to belong  
but i trust no one  
not a single damned soul in this world of constant bullshit  
hypocrisy at its climax  
turning your back one minute  
and smiling at death the next  
it's like this vicious cycle of zoom in zoom out  
that's it you've had enough  
get off the roller coaster before i call the cops  
but what if  
what if i don't want to get off the ride  
maybe i want to be stuck at the top of the ferris wheel  
standing like a possessed warrior  
ready to take the final plunge  
and die for the worthy causes  
that plague our lives with the sick and the dying  
starving our minds of what we really need  
what we have no clue about  
but what are we being denied  
the breath of fresh air  
that will bleed our lungs dry  
and lay us down to die in the  
beds we punish ourselves by making  
day in and day out  
as if the act itself is warrant for some award  
just take the dirty masses  
yearning to be free  
no yearning to be clean  
cleansed of all their stupidity and hatred  
cleansed of the dirty ignorance of their minds  
that they carry with them  
passing the filth on from generation to generation  
young to old and back again  
until the end of time  
the time we have tortured and mutilated  
this beautiful toxic wasteland we call  
EARTH  
so much that it is no more than a  
rotting  
slimy mass of lies and deception  
but we don't know the difference  
because we brainwashed ourselves  
to see the beauty in everything  
when in fact if you look close enough  
you will realize that there is no beauty  
the only beauty is created in the minds of the poets  
who can twist, transform, and manipulate the world  
flip it upside down so that what we see  
what we really see is the makings of war  
the makings of the dead come back to life  
to avenge the stupidity that put them in their graves in the first place  
but alas  
blind zombies float day in and day out  
repeating the cycles of their belligerence

Ode to Ill



Kapone is Ill

Pencil, Marker, and Gold Pen

"KAPONE" 05/24/03



## *Castle*

There are torrents  
laid with soldiers  
a deep moat  
too wide to wade  
an armory with blades  
and catapults  
and atom bombs  
and the tears of unicorns  
that blind the worst  
of men

And I am in the tower  
brushing my hair  
not even aware  
of the distance

to freedom.

*Jaysen Elsky*

## *Natural Acts of Life*

Wavering green leaf  
Still dancing with the dead branch  
A faithful lover

Silent avalanche  
Swept under her lost carpet  
Flawless denial

Rain clouds hang above  
Swallowing the sun and sky  
Wringing out their pain

A perfect union

*Ruddy Germain*

## *In My Shell*

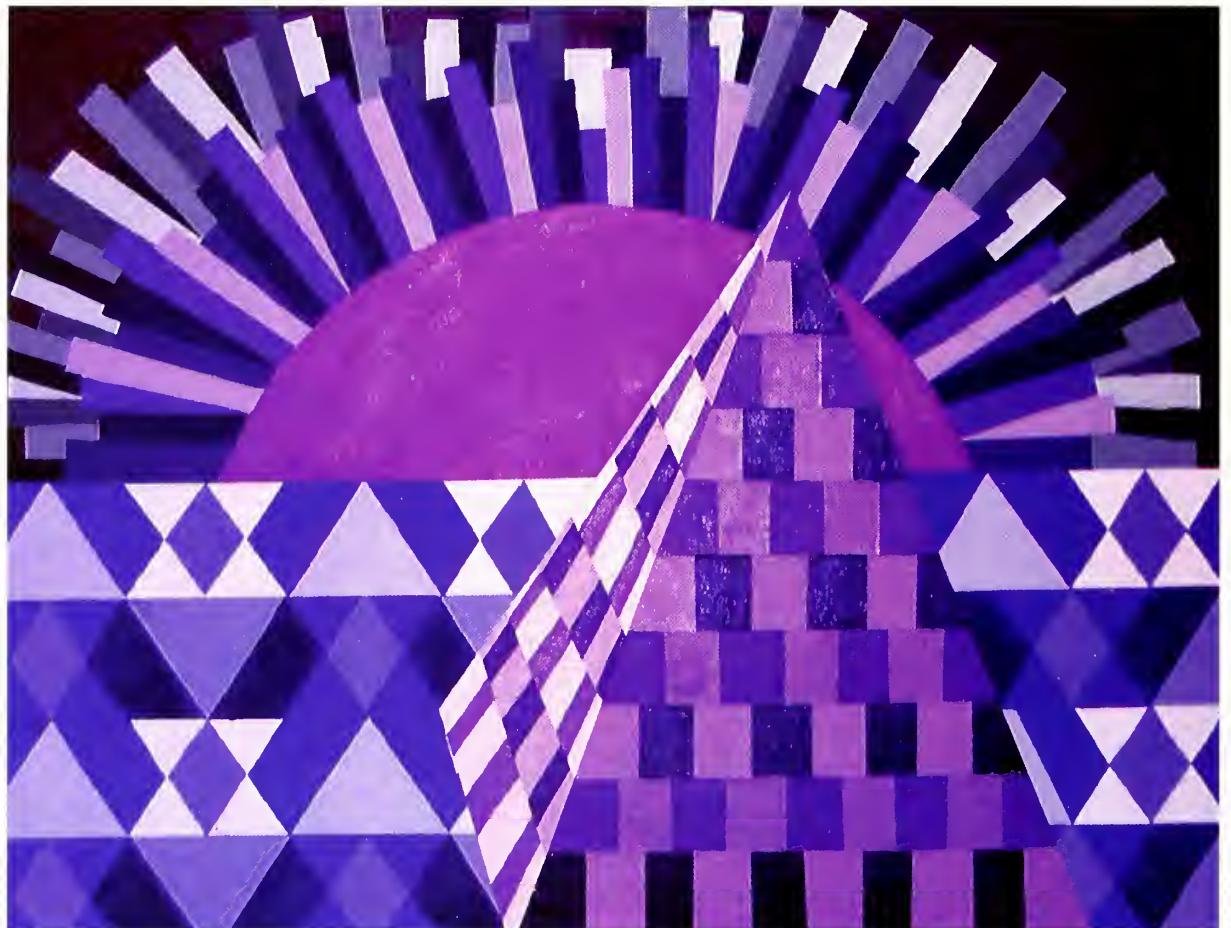
This is my shell  
Do not break it  
It is my keeper  
Do not take it  
Beneath it I am  
Completely naked  
The smile you see  
I always fake it  
There's room inside  
For another  
The pathway in  
You must discover  
But when you do  
You'll find in me  
A fruitful orchard  
Of many trees  
A golden meadow  
Filled with life  
And in the center  
A very dull knife  
Dull from battles  
To keep others out  
Worn through the years  
Of fear and doubt  
But don't be afraid  
To pass it by  
For each second you wait  
Is an hour I cry

*Daniel Berreth*



n Ku

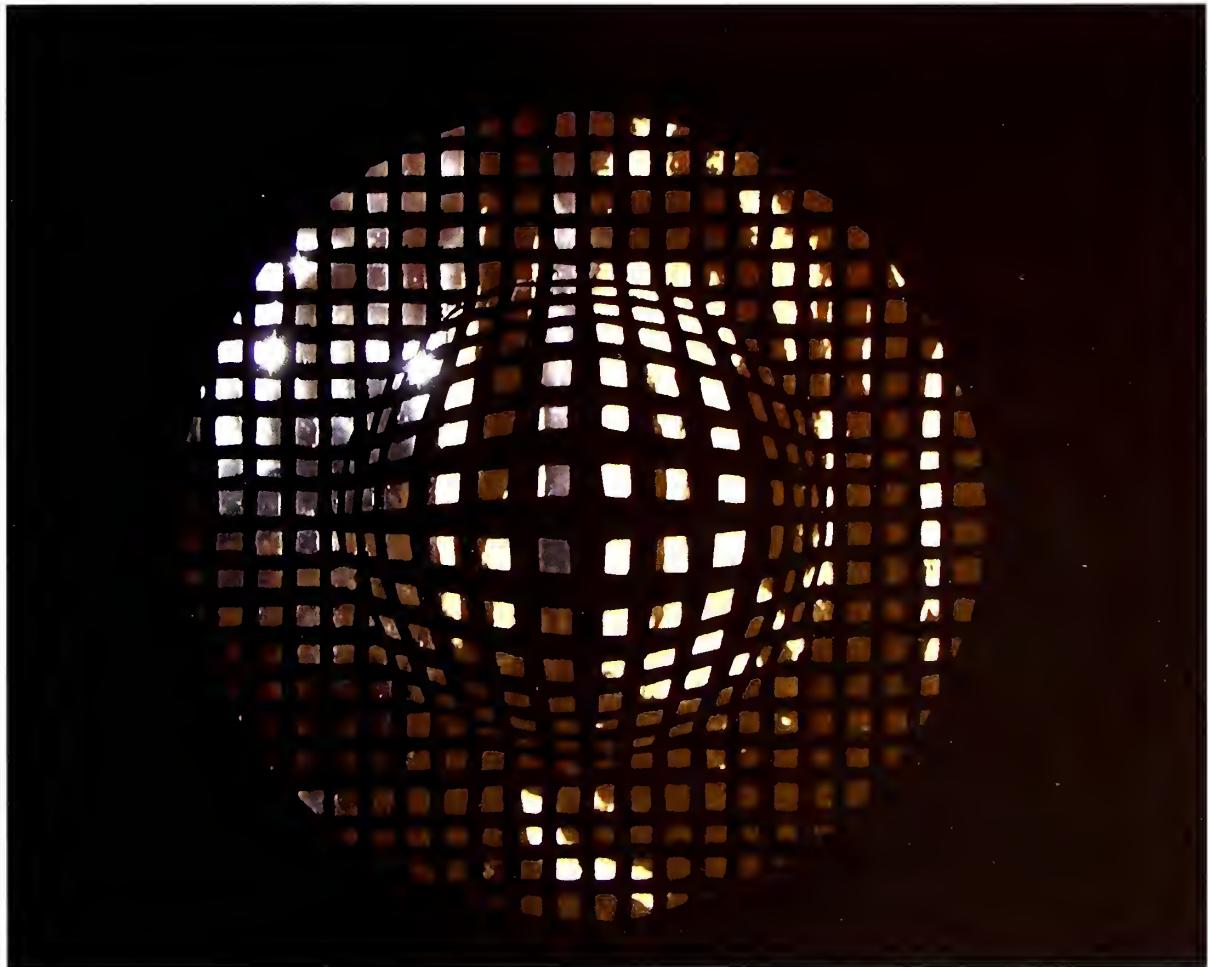
*Warm Pyramid*



*Kristina Danakos*

*Acrylic*

*Golden Sun*



*Walter Aleman*

*2-D Cut Out*



*Chen Ku*

## *Sprites, Pixies, & Nymphs*

They are those mystical creatures who fly in the forest,  
Tiny and full of life.  
Creatures with magical powers  
only coming to a special few.

Tiny and full of life,  
their wings take them far,  
only coming to the special few  
granting their wishes come true.

Their wings take them far,  
as they glisten in the sun  
and grant their wishes come true  
to all those who believe.

As they glisten in the sun,  
they sprinkle fairy dust all around  
especially to those who believe.  
Enchanting and intriguing is what they are.

They sprinkle fairy dust all around,  
these creatures with magical powers.  
Enchanting and intriguing is what they are,  
those mystical creatures who fly in the forest.

*Christin De La Rosa*

Innocence



Christin De La Rosa

Pencil



*Surplus - Chaos*



*Erick Estevanell*

*Acrylic on Canvas*

*Nude with Sorrows*



Erick Estevanell

Acrylic on Canvas



## *An Apparition of Jazz*

An Apparition of Jazz-  
Was put in the mind;  
With charcoal in hand,  
And plenty of time  
The creation evolved-  
If only to see,  
An escape from the trumpet  
Comes the soul of Louis

To accompany him  
Takes a voice quite unlike-  
Anyone other,  
So Lady Ella grabbed the mic.  
Singing sweet melody-  
As blind eyes filled with tears,  
Heard a harmony of passion  
That subsided all fears

But her cry was no solo-  
Another view was inspired,  
With a voice like changing seasons-  
That never grows tired.  
Billie shared it with us  
Her gift on that day-  
The lingering daydream that  
Her words did portray.

And last to come in-  
Like a tide from the sea  
Were pleasant guitar rhythms  
From his majesty, B.B.;  
King of the string,  
Oh what great riffs you bring  
United with the singing  
That we've heard at this thing.

But what are we at?  
Who's that guy in the middle?  
As the phonograph plays-  
So he spins out his riddle.  
And on this page here  
He's a permanent fixture  
Who would of guessed?  
He caught the moment with a picture.

*Kevin L. Calero*

*An Apparition of Jazz*



Kevin L. Calero

Charcoal



in Ku

*Nature's Grace*



*Theresa Neumann*

*Cyanotype*

## Dear Daddy

Room 621  
August 17<sup>th</sup>

She left around  
Nine o'clock  
I was grateful  
For the time alone  
Just you and me  
Daddy I am here

Room 621  
August 18<sup>th</sup>

One eye open  
One eye closed  
I held your hand  
Sat on your bed  
Stroked your face  
Knowing it was soon

Room 621  
August 19<sup>th</sup>

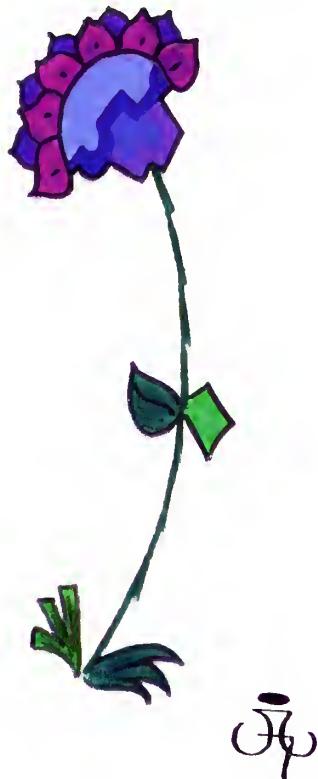
I raised my voice  
And called your name  
I spoke of us  
You squeezed my hand  
Your eyes alert  
I said goodbye

Room 621  
August 20<sup>th</sup>

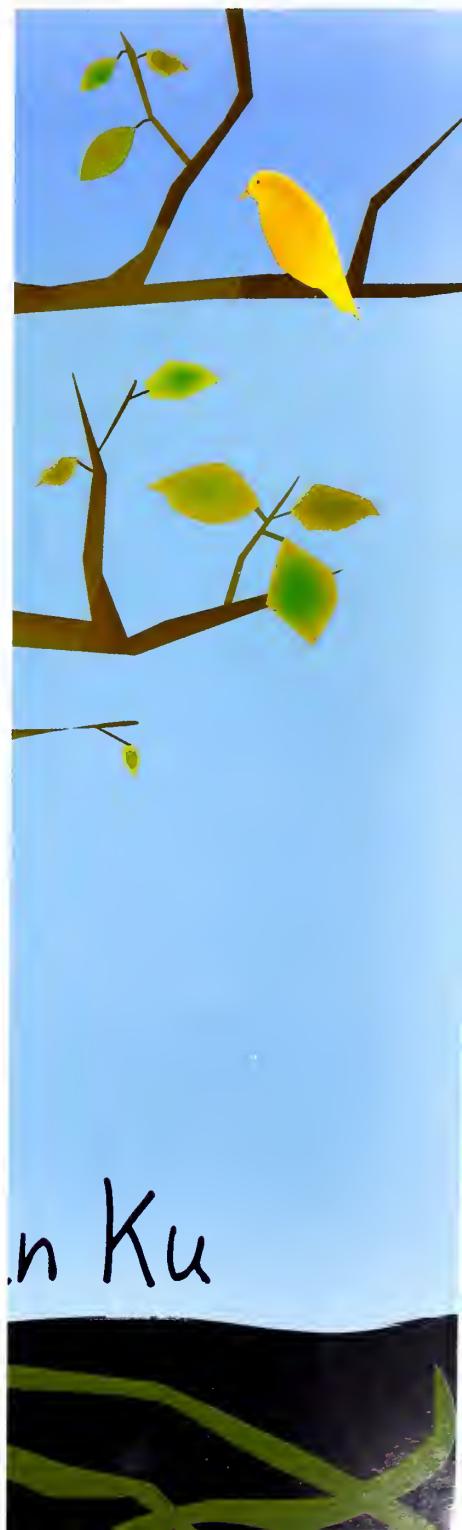
Two forty-five  
The call finally came  
With no pause  
I began to cry  
But I was lucky  
I said goodbye

Hope Nouello

## Puzzled Flower 2



Juan G. Herrera  
Color Pencil on Cotton Paper



## *Conflicts*

The first rays of sunlight were just beginning to rise over the mountaintops. A cool, crisp breeze was stirring through the tall pines causing them to sway back and forth. A constant flurry of snowflakes had again begun their chaotic dance downward to blend with the overnight fallen snow. Annie Martell sat alone in the kitchen thinking about the day ahead while her friends still lay sleeping upstairs. The planned activities for this particular vacation were skiing, skating, dog sledding, and snowmobiling. Having grown up in Massachusetts, Annie could hold her own on most winter sports, but the snowmobiling was the one that gave her pause this morning. Wave runner, motorcycle, snowmobile, even a moped, if it had a throttle on one handle and a brake on the other with gears somewhere in between, Annie panicked. Not about the machine itself. She had no problem whatsoever riding on the back. It was the actual driving of them that she feared. The shifting of gears, giving it gas, squeezing the brake, and not stalling, this she had no idea how to do. Annie felt that she had a certain image to maintain, *especially now*, and this was not it.

Each year, Annie, Maggie, and Liz would leave jobs and families behind and go on an adventure. Over the years, the forty-something fearless friends, as they liked to call themselves, had been hiking, camping, and whitewater rafting in the Carolinas, snorkeling and deep-sea fishing in Costa Rica, horseback riding and fly-fishing in Montana, hot air ballooning in Arizona, even kayaking and glacier ice hiking in Alaska. At times, things had become a bit competitive, each one trying to outdo the others. Usually it was Maggie who would initiate the dare, and Annie would accept the challenge. Annie, being

the most athletic, usually came out on top. So, the thought of admitting apprehension and ignorance was just not something her ego could handle right now. Maggie would eat that up and never let Annie forget it.

*Come on Martell, she said to herself. What's the big deal? You'll be able to do it! Think positive. Just put one hand on the left handlebar, one on the right, twist, hold tight, close your eyes, lift your feet, and take off! You'll be okay. What's the worst that can happen? You crash, look like an ass, and have to listen to Maggie's digs for days. God, I hope not!*

Just as these horrid thoughts passed through Annie's mind, Maggie O'Connor bounced down the stairs voicing her delight at the falling snow.

*"God, Annie, look at all the snow! Man, this is going to be a great day. I can't wait to see how skillful you are at snow sports. Remember, this is my territory! I'm going to go upstairs and get Liz so we can get going."*

Although Annie and Maggie were friends, they really weren't that close anymore. An increased amount of tension had built between them. Not as much relaxing fun, more of a "who could do what better" type of deal. It seemed that lately Maggie had become insistent on trying to outdo Annie – be better, be faster, be whatever... Maggie never seemed to let up on the extreme competitiveness. Whether it was a game of racquetball, or just playing a game of cards, lately Maggie had to win.

Liz, on the other hand, just enjoyed their times together. She loved the adventures, the companionship, and the time away from the job, the husband, and the kids. Liz Bain was the easygoing one of the group, the practical one, the one that kept them sane. Annie always thought it must have something to do with being able to balance a demanding job, a successful marriage, and raising three kids. God bless her, she thought.

They had all met many years ago

working at Publix Supermarket. Each had advanced to departmental management positions at various stores and had stayed close. About a year ago, tired of working long unpredictable hours, indoors, with unreliable help, Annie had decided to leave Publix and start her own business. Since the rapid success of Bow To Stern Yacht Detailing Service, Annie had enjoyed flexibility in hours, great money, sunshine, and a built-in "workout" program that had her whipped into tiptop shape in no time, and best of all – no Publix uniform!

About this time, Annie began to feel a distance between Maggie and herself. At first Annie thought it was just because she was no longer caught up in the Publix problems, but as time went by and Annie's business became more successful, a genuine jealousy seemed to develop within Maggie. Lately, even when they talked on the phone, Maggie just seemed totally uninterested in any aspect of Annie's business. Sometimes Maggie would just talk over her, cutting Annie off mid-sentence and continue on about *her* day in the Publix Produce Department. And lately, she had actually begun to belittle Annie's job.

A few weeks before they'd left for vacation, Annie had stopped in to Maggie's Publix to pick up a salad for lunch and to say hello before heading back to the marina. Just coming from waxing a boat behind a client's house, Annie was a bit sweaty and dirty with smears of wax on her clothes, arms and knees.

"Oh look," Maggie said smirking at Annie. "It's the lowly old boat washer, looking for food. Ya know, Annie, you are really just some rich jerk's hired maid, someone to clean their toys! Look at you, you're filthy! Being on your own and doing all that grunt work doesn't look so great to me. And just because you're making *big bucks*, you think you're hot shit! I truly don't know what you were thinking when you left Publix. Of course you're too pig-

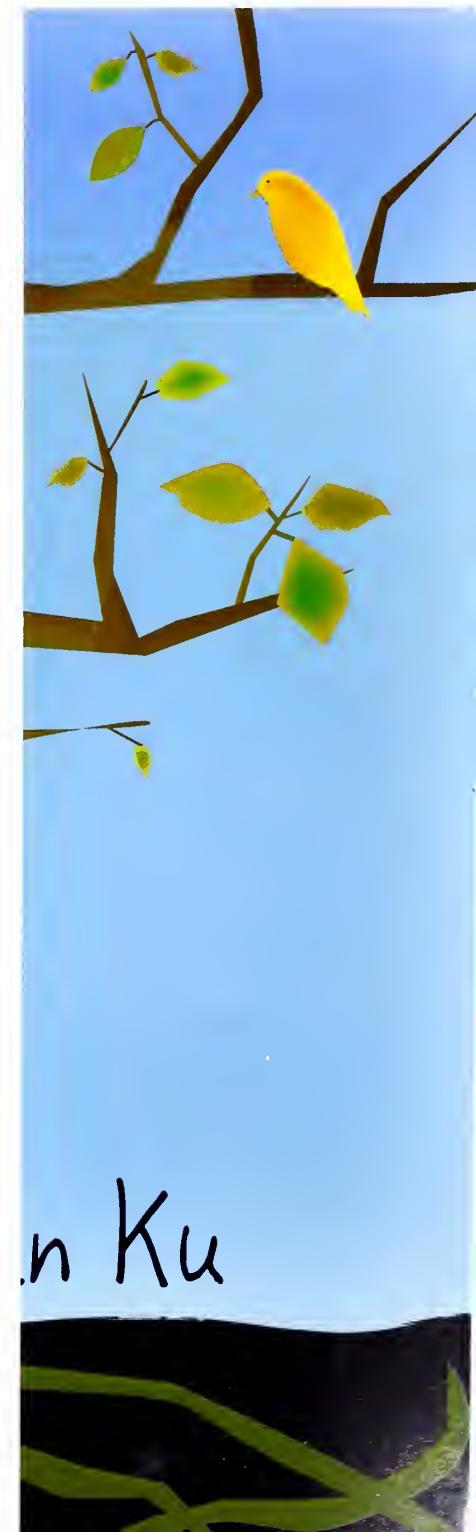
headed to admit you made a mistake. No company medical benefits, no paid vacations, no stock options, no company retirement plan. I still have all of that. Plus, I have my employees. And they respect me! I don't have to call my sister to help when it gets too busy, or when I want to go on vacation. Unlike you, I have employees to do the work. So what if I have no tan and have put on a few extra pounds, it's not the end of the world!"

"Hi, Maggie. Good to see you too! I'm so damn glad I stopped in. You know, lately I can always count on you to give me my much-needed dose of abuse. And about those extra pounds you're carrying.... maybe you can manage to work them off on vacation, huh? By the way, remind me to go to Winn Dixie next time I want lunch, the people there are much friendlier!" With that, Annie motioned goodbye and walked to the checkout to pay for her salad.

Thinking about it all now, if lodging and plane reservations hadn't already been made, Annie wasn't sure if she would have gone through with the vacation. But, she thought, maybe this will be a good time to repair their friendship, maybe find out where all the hostility was coming from.

"Hey Annie!" Maggie yelled from upstairs. "Are you going to get ready or are you just going to sit down there all day? Hurry up, so we can get going. Liz and I figured on a little skiing today. I can't wait to whip your ass down those slopes. And I don't care how good a shape you think you're in!"

"Oh God!" Annie groaned. So much for relationship repair, she thought. But what a relief it was that the sport of the day was going to be skiing. For now, her private fears of the snowmobile would stay hidden. Letting Maggie get ahold of that little secret fright could be deadly. Their little Publix scene and Maggie's recent harsh words regarding Annie's business were still very fresh in her mind. But, she refused to let



Maggie get the best of her. As she went upstairs to get ready, Annie thought: *Screw you, O'Connor. I have a vacation to enjoy, and I'm damn well gonna do it!*

They all went into town, got fitted for skis, poles, and boots and caught the local shuttle for the lift at Peak 8. After a few practice runs on the green slopes, the girls were ready for a bit more of a challenge. Growing up, Maggie had vacationed in such places as Aspen, Vail, and Telluride and was by far the best skier. So, of course, she wanted to head straight for the black diamond runs. But Liz's logic won out and onto the blue they went.

"Hey, Martell," Maggie yelled, her red curly hair flying as she whizzed by Annie. "Put a little hip action into it. That is, if you can manage it without falling. Or are you staying in snowplow mode because you're afraid of a little speed?"

Maggie's fast approach behind and by Annie had startled her almost enough to make her lose her balance. The truth was that Annie was taking it a little slow. Having had shoulder surgery years ago always made Annie a bit more cautious. She couldn't afford to wipe out and hurt herself. No matter how much Maggie taunted her, a nice, easy pace was just fine for today. Let Maggie be the hot dog if she wanted to be. Annie didn't always have to be the best. That was more Maggie's deal.

After a few more runs, making some not so graceful moves, falling down a few times, and laughing a lot, they decided to call it a day and head back to the chalet they had rented. Liz cooked a quick dinner of pasta and a salad, and the three took their glasses of wine and jumped into the hot tub to relax.

"God, did you guys see me out there!" Maggie exclaimed. "I really rocked down those slopes! This girl still has the stuff, I tell you. I was damn hot! Hey Annie, it's too bad you chickened out on running the black diamonds. I would have

loved to show you what I really could do. But, there's always tomorrow, if you think you can handle it, that is..."

Neither having the energy nor the desire to reply to Maggie's endless sarcasm, Annie turned to Liz and said, "Thanks for making us dinner tonight, it was great. Any ideas for tomorrow? What would you like to do, Liz?"

"I would really love to try that dog sledding thing. You both know how much I love dogs, and it would be so cool to run through the snow with them. I think we need reservations, so if it's all right with you two, I'll go do that now."

Both Maggie and Annie agreed that dog sledding sounded good, so off Liz went to call. After quite a while, and grinning from ear to ear, Liz was back with all the information.

"Okay, girls, we're booked for 2:00 tomorrow afternoon, the place is called "Good Times", and they'll be here to pick us up at 1:00. The lady on the phone explained that we go with a guide who rides ahead on a snowmobile while we're behind with a team of eight dogs. The dogs are out front, of course, and one person sits in the sled with their legs stretched out to strap themselves in with a seatbelt thing. The other person runs behind the sled until the dogs get going at a good pace, then they jump on the back part and steer. Oh, and since there's three of us, one has to ride on the snowmobile, then we all switch places. Sounds great, huh? I can't wait. And, since it's in the afternoon, I thought that we could do a little skating at the pond in the morning to kind of warm up, what do you think?"

*Snowmobile...Annie thought. Oh, God, a snowmobile. But just as a passenger, I'm sure, right? Can't be driving, no, can't be, not with the guide there, no, gotta just be on the back. Yeah, okay, yeah, that's okay. I'll be okay.*

"Annie? Hey, earth to Annie!" Liz said. "Did you hear what I said? Does it

sound okay? You kinda zoned out there for a minute."

"Yeah, Liz, it sounds great. And maybe we could go ice skating in the morning before we go to the dog place."

"See Liz, what'd I tell you?" Maggie piped in. "She wasn't listening to a word you said, she was off in her own little dreamy land, probably out *yachting* with one of her rich and famous customers. Or better yet, maybe *now* she's fantasizing that she actually owns the boats! Too bad, babe, reality is you just wash them!"

"Maggie, for god's sake, would you just drop the sarcasm? Just get over yourself, and grow up." With that, Annie bid goodnight to Liz and went inside.

The next day came and things were a bit frosty between Maggie and Annie, but they went ice skating anyway and then back to the chalet to meet the "Good Times" pick-up van. Arriving at the dog sledding place, they got special boots to put on, received their instructions, signed the waiver of responsibility, got introduced to Joe, their guide, and met their team of dogs. Liz, of course, had to memorize each dog's name before they could begin. Their instructions were simple. The person seated was only responsible for holding on and was to help the driver steer by leaning into the turns. That way, both driver and passenger would be leaning in the same direction and not fighting against each other when approaching a curve. Joe also explained that the only way to get the dogs to slow down was by applying pressure to the brake. He showed them a metal bar with teeth on the bottom that was located at the back of the sled. He explained that this brake worked by jumping on it with full body weight causing it to dig into the snow, slowing the dogs. He

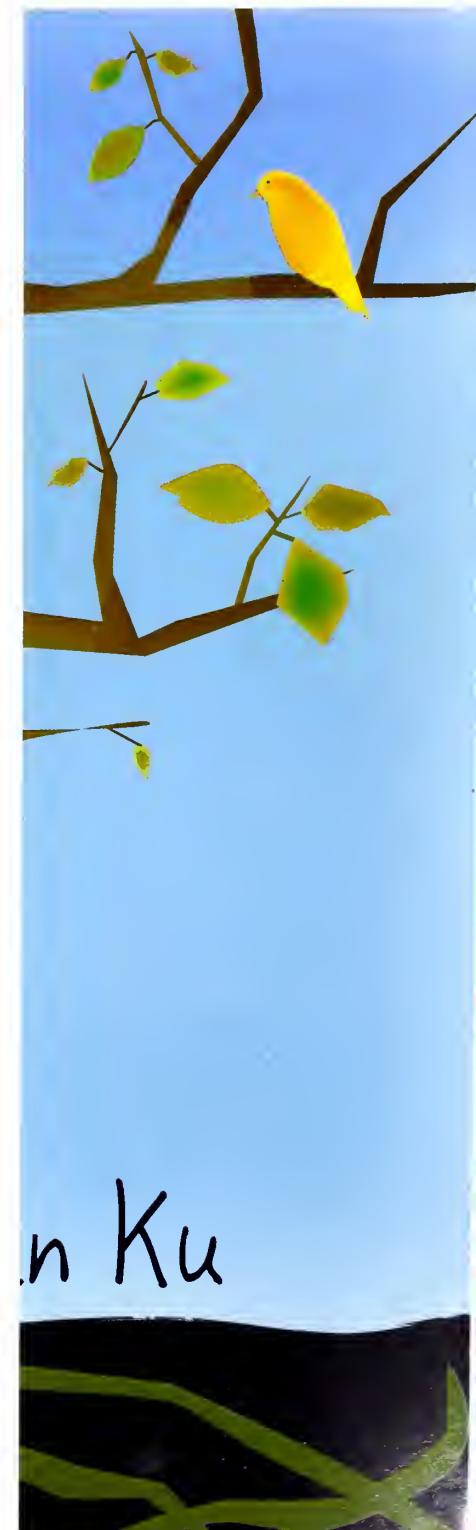
added that a forceful yell of "Whoa!" would also help.

"Do you guys mind if I steer the sled first?" Liz asked excitedly. "I think I know all their names and want to be able to call out to them like Joe suggested while I can still remember them. Plus, I'm so pumped I don't think I could sit still! I want to run with the dogs! So, which one of you wants to be my passenger?"

Annie already knew from their initial instructions that the third person would ride on the back of the snowmobile, so she opted for this position and let Maggie take the seat in the sleigh. Annie had two motives for this. One, by doing this, she knew that when it was time to switch, Maggie would want to steer and Annie would end up in the sled seat at Maggie's mercy. Her reasoning was that this would be allowing Maggie to have the upper hand, therefore hoping to make her happy and keep peace between them.

Her number two reason, and the most important, was that if she was on the back of the snowmobile, she could get a good feel of how to drive it. Up ahead and out of sight from the others, Annie would ask Joe to give her a little lesson on the functions of the controls. Maybe she could even persuade him to let her sit in the driver's seat and test it out. Her ego wouldn't suffer by playing helpless dumb blonde. Guys usually ate that stuff up, and that ploy had always come in handy for Annie in a pinch.

Everyone got into their positions and Joe and Annie took off on the snowmobile. As soon as the snowmobile had gotten to its spot on the trail above the main one, Joe honked the horn signaling the girls to begin. Annie sat and watched as Liz took off, her yell of "Hike it up!" echoing through the



trees. Holding onto the sleigh handles, and running all out behind it while pushing Maggie, Liz could be heard coaxing the dogs to run faster. She screamed, "Go, Czar! Come on, Bullet!" to the lead pair. To increase their speed, she praised the last pair, "Atta girl, Venus. Good boy, Bandit."

When their speed and downhill descent had finally gotten fast enough, Liz jumped on the back of the sleigh, letting the dogs do the work. The last thing Annie could make out from her viewpoint was the sled approaching a sharp corner to the left and Liz yelling something to Maggie. Both of them leaned left, made the corner and then were out of sight.

Joe started up the snowmobile again, and with Annie trying to memorize his every motion, they headed back down towards the main run to position themselves ahead of the girls. While waiting for the sled to come into sight, Annie quizzed Joe about the basics of how to drive a snowmobile, and Joe willingly gave her all his best tips. Just when she had talked him into a quick lesson, the dogs, with Liz and Maggie laughing hysterically, rounded the corner.

Liz spotted the snowmobile off to the side and knew this was their cue to start slowing the dogs. "Whoa, my babies!" Liz yelled while applying pressure to the brake. The dogs started to slow and came to a full halt. Moving around restlessly and biting at the snow to quench their thirst, the dogs welcomed the treats Joe handed them.

"Annie! Annie!" screamed Liz. "Did you see us? Oh my God, it was so cool! We were flying."

The girls also had some water, took a few pictures of the dogs and the scenery, and then switched places, just as Annie had figured. Maggie took her position of control behind the sleigh, Annie buckled herself in the front. Liz jumped on the back of the snowmobile, and off she went with Joe.

"Okay, Annie. Are you ready for the ride of your life, because these dogs haul

butt, and I'm not slowing them down one damn bit when they start to pick up speed. So, you'd better hold on tight, lean when I tell you to just like Joe explained, and say a prayer, 'cuz your ass is now mine!"

Smiling to herself, Annie replied, "You go for it Maggie. Enjoy the power. Get it all out of your system. I'm ready for whatever you have, so bring it on!"

And with that, Maggie let out a war cry, yelled, "Hike it up!" and off they went, the dogs barking excitedly.

This part of the trail happened to be the downhill section, so they were clipping along at a real good pace. Up ahead they could see a very sharp U-curve with trees on both sides. Maggie smiled to herself as she yelled to Annie, "Hold on tight and lean hard to the right!" Then, watching Annie do as she was told, Maggie shifted her full body weight to the left instead. The dogs rounded the corner, but the sleigh, with Annie leaning hard right, tipped left because of the standing force of Maggie's lean. Realizing that they were not going to make the curve, Annie swiveled her head around to see what was going on. She saw Maggie gripping the sled handles, her body leaning left, her knee jammed against the left side for support, an evil smile on her face. Just as the sleigh toppled completely over onto its side, Maggie let out a wicked laugh, jumped off the back, and rolled to the ground. The dogs, still running full steam ahead, dragged Annie face first through the banks of powdered snow for several feet before they became tangled in a clump of trees.

"You son of a bitch!" Annie screamed when the sled had finally stopped. She unbuckled herself, righted the sleigh, and jumped to her feet, scooping snow out of the top of her shirt and her jacket. Annie shook all the snow out of her hair and removed her bent sunglasses from her face, her blue eyes filled with rage. She cringed as she held the bridge of her nose and her left ear. She touched her face with her

ungloved right hand and came away with blood. "O'Connor, I am going to fucking kill you!" Annie turned towards where Maggie was laying just in time to see the smirk on her face. "What, you fucking think this is funny?! You did this on purpose, you son of a bitch, and I have had enough of your shit."

Annie leaned forward, head down, and took off running full speed straight at Maggie. Maggie got to her feet and tried to move out of the way, but Annie's head collided dead center with Maggie's stomach, knocking the wind out of her and sending her backwards to the ground with Annie landing on top of her. Annie drew back her fist and was about to smash it into Maggie's face when the sound of the barking dogs triggered an instant of rationality. At the very last second before connecting fist to face, Annie opened her hand instead and slapped her hard across the face. Grabbing the front of Maggie's jacket, Annie picked her partially up out of the snow and shook her. Then, disgusted with the whole situation, Annie released the jacket and let her fall back to the ground. Wide-eyed, Maggie looked up at her, stunned and in shock. She put her hands to her face and sat speechless.

Shaking her head, Annie yelled, "I don't know what the hell your problem is! I don't know if it's with me, or my job, or if you're just jealous of my freedom and independence, or because you're miserable, or because you're just a pain in the ass bitch, or maybe, it's all of the above. But, Maggie, I have had it with you. You deliberately tipped that sled, and then you laughed about it. What the hell is wrong with you?"

Maggie, holding her left cheek, opened her mouth to respond just as the roar of the snowmobile sounded around the corner. Both women just stared as Liz and Joe came to a stop and dismounted.

"What the hell happened? Are you two all right?" Liz asked, looking from Maggie to Annie and back. "My God, we

could hear the dogs barking like mad! At first, we thought they were just excited, but when you guys didn't show up, we finally figured we'd better come see where you were. Looks like a good thing we did. Oh my God Annie, your face is all cut up and you're bleeding! And Maggie, one side of your face is all red, and you look scared shitless! What happened here?"

Not wanting to get into details, Annie replied, "We had a slight problem with our run, and that's all I want to say about it right now." Turning to Joe, who was still untangling the dogs, Annie said, "Look, I know we have to get these dogs back to base, but is there a shortcut or something? I don't want to finish the trail." Then, to Liz, she said, "Sorry, but I've had it for today."

Getting to her feet, Maggie said, "Listen, all I want to do is get back to town, find a bar, and have a good, strong drink. Lots of drinks. What's the fastest way to make that happen? There'll be a large tip for you, Joe, if you can pull that off."

Grinning, Joe radioed home base, gave them their position, and arranged for two other guys, another snowmobile, and a pull-wagon to meet them. Within a short time they were on their way out of there. Verbal appreciation and money was exchanged back at the base, and then Annie, Maggie, and Liz boarded the van back to town in total silence.

Almost to their chalet and not being able to stand it any longer, Liz said, "Okay, you guys. What gives? What exactly happened out there? I know there's been tension between you two lately, not sure why, but come on, get over it, we're on vacation, so kiss and make up already!"

Just then, the van pulled into their driveway and the girls got out. Maggie turned to Liz and said, "I'm going to go take a hot shower, change clothes, and head down to that place in town, The Dredge. I heard that they mix their drinks real strong, and right now, that's exactly what I want."



And with that, she headed up the stairs.

"Well, that sounds good to me too." Liz said. "Annie, how 'bout you? Some food, a few drinks, 'cause we need to get whatever this problem is between you and Maggie straightened out."

"No, I think I'll pass. I'm not in the mood."

Liz looked at Annie and said, "No. No way, Martell. You guys are not going to leave me in the dark about what went on today. So, get your little butt upstairs and get ready, 'cause we're all going out."

"Okay, okay, a drink does sound good. Besides, I don't want you only hearing *her* version."

At The Dredge, they found a table in the bar area and immediately ordered a round of drinks and a bucket of wings. Liz, sitting between Annie and Maggie, let the two of them take a few good gulps when their drinks arrived before saying, "Okay, I've waited long enough. What the hell's up with you two?"

Annie's eyes coldly met Maggie's and she said, "As far as I'm concerned, this started way before today. But today's incident was the last straw. Like I said earlier Maggie, I don't know what your problem is, and at this point, I don't think I really care. And, Liz, regarding today, my take is that Maggie purposely tipped the sled over, bailed out, and let the dogs drag me face first through the snow bank while she sat on her ass, laughing. Is that about right, Mag?"

"Well, I really didn't mean for you to get hurt, Annie. I just got a little caught up in the moment and at the time it seemed like a really funny thing to do. Come on, you must admit, it was quite comical with the sled tipped over, the dogs all tangled up, and you covered in snow. Couldn't help but

laugh."

"Maggie, it was not funny. And, I think you wanted to hurt me, I just don't think you thought I'd react like I did. You're more used to me just lying down and taking all the shit you dish out. Well, no more."

"You know what the problem is, Annie? You always have to be better than us. Publix wasn't good enough for you, you had to go out and start your *own* company, make all sorts of money, rub elbows with all the rich people and then come and tell us all your little stories so that we feel less than you."

"So, you're jealous?"

"No, I'm not jealous! I'm just tired of hearing you brag about things; thought you needed to be brought down a few notches, rub your face in the snow, so to speak."

"Am I hearing this right? You're admitting the dog sled stunt was on purpose? You meant for me

to crash? You're unbelievable, Maggie. What kind of friend are you? Not one I need, that's for sure!" Annie pushed her chair back and stood up from the table. "Liz, you had good intentions trying to smooth things over with us, but it's not going to work. I'm outta here. I've had enough."

The next morning, Liz found Annie downstairs reading a book and having a cup of tea. "So, is this it? Are you guys not friends anymore?"

"Look Liz, face it, Maggie and I are beyond trying to be friends. She resents me for leaving Publix, and no matter what I do, she's going to feel that way, like I deserted you guys. I'm tired of worrying about it,

*You're more used to  
me just lying down  
and taking all the  
shit you dish out.*

*Well, no more.*

I'm tired of trying so hard, and I'm tired of second-guessing myself and feeling like I've done something wrong. Do you think like she does, too?"

"Absolutely not. You should know me better than that. I'm happy for you and what you've accomplished. But what are we supposed to do for the remaining days of vacation? Just sit around here and stare at each other?"

"I really hadn't thought that far ahead yet, Liz. But I see no reason to ruin the rest of it for you. I can buck up and deal with her for a few more days, it may be tense, but what else is new? If she's willing, then so am I."

"Willing to do what, Martell?"  
Maggie asked as she came into the room.  
"Bend down, kiss your feet, and ask for  
forgiveness? Don't think so!"

"No, Maggie, how about just being civil to one another? Think you can handle that?"

"Honey, I can handle any damn thing you can dish out. So let's go get ready. Next on the list is snowmobiling."

Knowing that this would be a huge turning point for her, Annie squared her shoulders, stared Maggie dead in the eye and said, "Yeah, okay O'Connor – let's go." Taking a deep breath and looking from Maggie to Liz, she continued, "You know, I've never actually driven a snowmobile before, but sure, why not, I'm game. Worst thing that can happen is that I wipe out and end up face first in a snow bank, right? Won't be the first time. But, at least I have the guts to try something new. That's more than I can say about you, Maggie." Smiling, Annie confidently thought to herself, *snowmobiling, here I come!*

*Debra E. Johnson*



*Party/Las Olas*



*Tyler Hager*

*Silver Gelatin Print*

*Dancing Lights*



Tyler Hager

*Silver Gelatin Print*



n Ku

## *The River*

you open your eyes and are awakened as you're being swept down this wild angry river this thrashing roaring aquatic beast of nature and you're clawing at the surface orphaned to this drowning dream and you can't keep it together long enough to pick your head up above the water and scream so the water rushes in and you're filled with the angry roaring beast and it floods your body and suffocates your mind and you can't find you can't find you can't find up

suspended directionless wondering and choking on the bitter taste of fear and block out the whispers from the monster in your ear telling you to struggle telling you to let it come and let it go and pay no attention to what you don't know

And as the trees run by in a branchy blur  
my gaze is stuck on thoughts of her  
I feel my back on the rocks  
and the sky's in my face  
outlining the memories I've got of this place  
watching fall turn to winter  
and winter to spring  
and not having control of one god damn thing  
and this water is numbing  
much like the shock  
of waiting for death by the hands of the clock  
and so I'm at the mercy of this river  
in front of fear-upon my knees  
suffering slowly from this decaying disease  
and while my body is thrown  
I twist and I gasp  
because I will not let my next breath be the last.

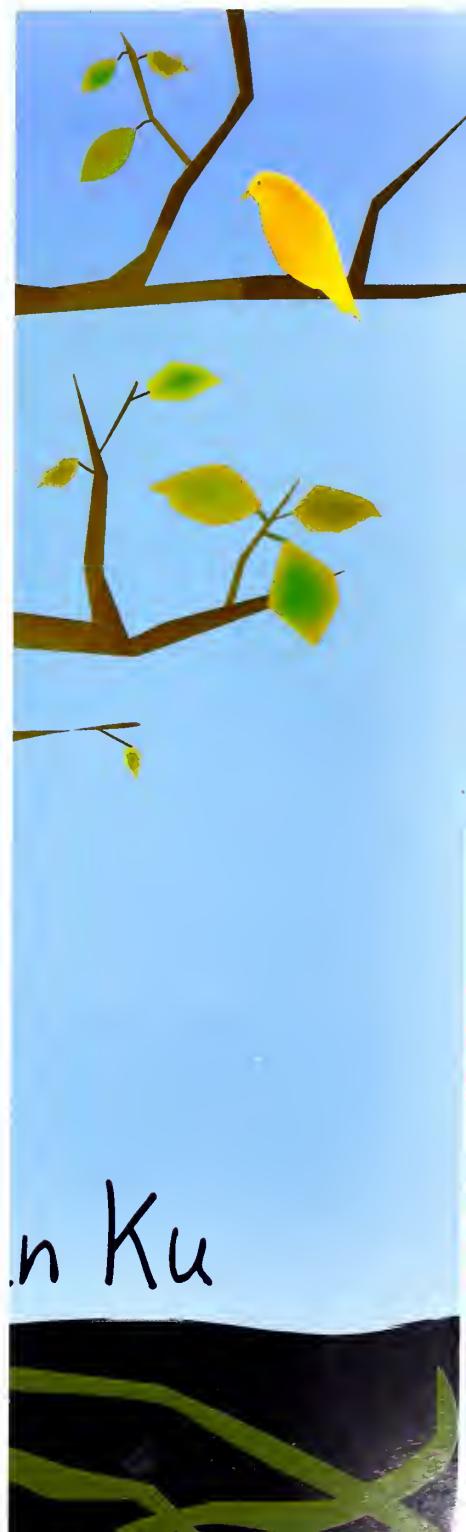
*Tori Leigh Meyer*



Roxanna Aldama

*Untitled*

*Silver Gelatin Print*



n Ku

## *Ebstein's Property*

Two months before his death, Hank Ebstein was handed the deeds to a large stretch of property in the California foothills. It was property that Hank never knew that his father, David Ebstein, owned. Because of his failing health, Hank was unable to investigate the property. Since his son, Mark, had taken care of him during his sickness, Hank decided to transfer the deeds of the property over to his son. Months after his father's demise, Mark pulled out the old deeds and noticed that his grandfather had scribbled at the bottom of the deeds "the property is priceless". Financially overwhelmed by his father's medical bills and funeral expenses, Mark figured that he could sell the property to pay off most of the bills. After reading over the deeds, Mark decided to take his family on a trip from Atlanta, Georgia, to California, to see the property.

"By the look of the address on the deeds, the property should be a mile up the road on the left," said Mark Ebstein.

"I don't know about you, dad, but my kidney's 'bout to burst if we don't pull over soon. Look, there's a café on the right, we can stop up there," said Mark's only child, Matt.

"I can sure use a cup of ice cold tea," said Mark's wife, Marge.

"Well, I can use a Coke right about now so let's stop, just for a few minutes," said Mark. He turned his van into the sand-covered parking lot of the OUT WEST CAFÉ. Matt slid the side door open and ran to the restroom before Mark turned off the vehicle. Mark and Marge laughed at their son.

"Just imagine, we once changed his diapers, now he's a law student; it's hard to believe it," said Mark, smiling.

"Must be the fertilizer in the food, 'cause it don't take 'em long to sprout up

these days, honey," said Marge. Mark turned off the vehicle and stepped out into the warmth of the blistering sun. For a brief moment, he watched several buzzards streak across the endless sky. Mark pulled out his worn-out wallet and counted his money to make sure that they stayed well within their tight budget. He knew how hard of a financial strain his father's sudden sickness and demise placed upon his family's finances, but like a good son, he never once complained. Stuffing his wallet back into his pocket, Mark walked around the van and shut the sliding door that his son left open.

"Come on, honey," Mark said to his wife. He threw his large arm around Marge's shoulders and walked with her inside the small café. The cool air from the air conditioner engulfed them when they entered. Country music filled every corner of the cozy place.

"Mom, dad, over here!" yelled Matt. He waved his parents over to a comfortable leather covered booth near a large window.

"Boy, this place is really nice. It sure beats standing around outside in the heat," said Mark. He removed his Atlanta Braves baseball cap from his balding head and sat down with his wife and son. "Did you make it to the restroom in time?" asked Mark.

"Dad, don't make a public joke out of it. Especially after I almost wet my pants," said Matt. They all laughed.

"May I help you?" asked a young waitress as she approached their table. Her golden blonde hair was braided in two long braids that hung down across her shoulders. She wore a white cowboy hat upon her head and a plaid dress that resembled the table-cloths on each table. She flipped open a small tablet as her sea blue eyes gazed at Mark, waiting for his reply.

"I'll have a large Coke soda, and my wife will have a large ice tea with lemons on the side. Matt, tell the waitress what you want," said Mark.

"Sure, I'll have a large Coke soda and a large fry," said Matt. He smiled then winked his eye at the attractive waitress. She rolled her eyes at Matt and replied, "That's one large Coke, one large ice tea with lemons on the side, and another large Coke soda with fries. Will that complete your order?"

"Honey, maybe she can give you some information about the property," said Marge.

"Yeah, I almost forgot about that," said Mark. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the old deeds. Mark pointed at the address on the deeds as the freckled-face waitress placed her tablet and pen inside her apron and looked down at the deeds.

"I was recently willed a large stretch of property located at this address. Perhaps you may know something about the property."

"That's Ebstein's Property," said the waitress, stretching her eyes. She took one step backwards when she got a good look at the name and address on the deeds. Several people dinning in booths near Mark and his family ended their conversations when they heard the waitress mention the name of Ebstein. Onlookers began to whisper to each other and stare at Mark and his family.

"Let me put your order in first and I'll be right back to tell you about your property," said the waitress. She pulled the tablet from her apron and headed to the bar to fill the order.

"We seemed to have said something wrong because everyone's pointing and staring at us," said Marge.

"You're right, I noticed the same thing," said Mark. Minutes later, the waitress returned with the order.

"Here are your drinks and fries," said the waitress. She placed the items on the table and wiped her damp hands upon her apron. She then explained, "The deeds prove that you were willed Ebstein's property, but listen to me, that property a few miles up the road is an evil, deadly place.

People around here avoid it like the plague, especially after the murders that took place there."

"Murders, what murders?" asked Mark.

"When I was seventeen years-old, I lost a good friend, Jerome Banner, up at Ebstein's place. Jerome went there to find a few western souvenirs for a school project that we were working on. I warned him not to go up to that old miner's town, but he didn't listen. Hours later, the police found his bullet-riddled body sprawled out on the floor of the old saloon in a pool of blood. Every time I think about it, it gives me the creeps. Come to think of it, just last year during Halloween evening, three college students were visiting from out of town and stopped by Ebstein's place to take photos and visit the saloon. They were all shot to death in the saloon that night. The strangest thing though, when they examined the bodies of the three students, they didn't find one bullet inside the bodies, or at the scene. It was all over the news around here. Because of a lack of evidence, the killers were never caught. If I were you, I'd stay as far away from that place as humanly possible," said the waitress.

"Hey waitress, this ain't no damn talk show, I could use a little service over here!" shouted one angry patron from across the room.

"I'm sorry, but I've got to go, but please heed my warning and stay away from Ebstein's place," said the waitress as she hurried over to see what the other customer wanted. Taking the last sip from his Coke soda, Mark placed his glass on the table and said, "I don't care what she says, I'm going to the property. I didn't come all the way out here for nothing."

"I'm with you, dad. I think she's just tryin' to spook us off," said Matt as he finished his last strips of fries. He washed them down with a quick gulp of his Coke soda.

"I don't know about you two, but her



story really did something to me...I'm shaking like a leaf on a tree," said Marge.

"Come on, mom, that's just the air conditioner," said Matt.

"You'll be just fine, honey, let's get out of here," said Mark. He dropped a tip for the waitress, and the bill amount, on the table. As they exited the café, the warmth of the sunshine seemed to thaw them out like meat taken out of a freezer.

"That sunshine feels so good," said Marge as she stretched her arms out in the hot sunrays. "I guess it was the air conditioner," she said.

"See, I told you that that was the problem. Your shaking had nothing to do with some old murders," said Matt.

"Okay, you proved your point, Matt, now let's get to the property so we can settle down and relax from the long drive," said Mark. Loading the vehicle, they drove several miles up the highway.

"By the look of the address on these deeds, the property should be just up the road on the left," said Mark.

"I don't know how anything could still be standing out in middle of this hot place," said Mark's wife, Marge. Bubbling with anticipation, Mark drove his van over a small hill and approached an old abandoned saloon and seven wooden shacks along one side of the road. The buildings were so old that the wood appeared ash gray. Above the door of one of the shacks, a sign read EBSTEIN'S PROPERTY. Mark pointed with a disappointed look on his face as he said to his wife and son, "I guess that's the property over there." Mark parked his van in front of the shacks and stepped out into the heat of the noonday sun. Several wild rabbits, lizards, and other creatures, sensing Mark's presence, scurried about amidst the tumble weeds and sun-baked sand surrounding the property. Mark double-checked the deeds and frowned at his findings.

"What's going on here? It's the same address on the deeds. This can't be right,

maybe we missed a street, but I'm sure I followed the map," Mark said to Marge and his son, Matt. He leaned up against his vehicle and checked the map and deed's address once again. Matt and Marge also stepped out of the vehicle.

"What on earth was my grandfather thinking about when he willed dad this old crappy shack out in the middle of nowhere?" asked Mark.

"I'm at a loss for words myself, honey. I'm as shocked about it as you are," said Marge.

"To be honest, dad, when you said that you were given land in California, I thought it would be some luxurious mansion overlooking the seashore. You know, one with high gates and butlers to cater to your every need. But this property is the opposite, it's absolutely depressing," said Matt. Mark removed his cap and rubbed his balding head as he folded his arms and stared at the old wooden saloon and shacks hidden in the back hills of California. Small gusts of warm breeze seemed to toy with Marge's graying hair.

"Go ahead and unload the van, Matt," Mark instructed his son. Matt rolled up his sleeves and unloaded the vehicle. He threw the remainder of their luggage near the fragile steps just in front of the shack bearing the sign EBSTEIN'S PROPERTY. Dust flew about for a moment; then quickly settled.

"Be careful, Matt, I have several fragile things in those bags," said Mark. He placed his cap back upon his head. "Marge, I can't believe that we drove all the way across the United States to reach a dilapidated dump like this. What a big waste of time. I heard stories when I was a child that my grandfather was quite a wild one in his days, but I never imagined that he would do this to my father. Man, what a disappointment," said Mark.

"Listen, honey, please don't let it get the best of you. We'll survive this like we survived any other disappointment we

encountered in the past. Sometimes the greatest wealth in the world is to simply have someone standing in your corner for support. You know that I'm always beside you through thick and thin. I know you had your hopes up but don't you worry about this property; we'll do just fine. We'll make the best of the trip by staying here tonight and visiting Universal Studios tomorrow, now that we're here in California," said Marge. She embraced her disappointed husband and calmed his anger.

"I don't understand how all my life I continuously end up with the short end of the stick. That has always been my life story. What did I ever do to gain such undeserved bad luck? Tell me, what, Marge?" questioned Mark. He crinkled up the deed to the property and tossed it into a small patch of dried tumbleweeds gathered against one side of the shack. Frowning, Mark grabbed some of their luggage from the van and stormed up the squeaky steps. As he pushed the door open, small splinters of rotted wood and sand dropped down from its fragile frame onto Mark's hat, shoulders, and the wooden floor. Frustrated, Mark brushed himself off as his eyes landed on a large scorpion scurrying off between the crevices of the walls.

"Look at that. There's no telling what other deadly creatures are hiding out in this old rickety shack. I'm really surprised that after all these years, this wreck of a place is still standing," said Mark. He dropped his bags upon the floor as his anger flared up again. "Who in their right mind would want to live here anyway?"

"Well, obviously your grandfather liked it at one time. Apparently he thought that it was worth the effort of keeping it in the family by passing it down to your father," Marge said smiling. Unable to remain angry after her awkward, unexpected statement, Mark broke out in laughter. Matt threw his arms around his father's shoulders, saying, "Now this is the dad that I remember."

"You always seem to know what to say to lift my spirit," said Mark. He hugged his wife.

"That's why you begged my mother and father for my hand in marriage—remember?" asked Marge. She displayed her diamond ring to her husband.

"Yes, I remember. How can I ever forget?" asked Mark.

"Now that you two have made up, are we staying here to experience the great outdoors? I'm anxious to get to the river out back and do a little fishing before nightfall," said Matt.

"I guess we'll stay in California a few more days. That should be all the time that we need in order to rest up a bit from the long drive here. Plus, I can certainly use a fishing day on the river to calm my nerves," said Mark.

"Honey, take Matt out on the river and catch our evening meal. And don't forget to bring back some wood for the potbelly stove. I'll get things settled around here and make the place feel a little more like home," said Marge.

"Mom, are you sure you'll be okay in here by yourself?" asked Matt.

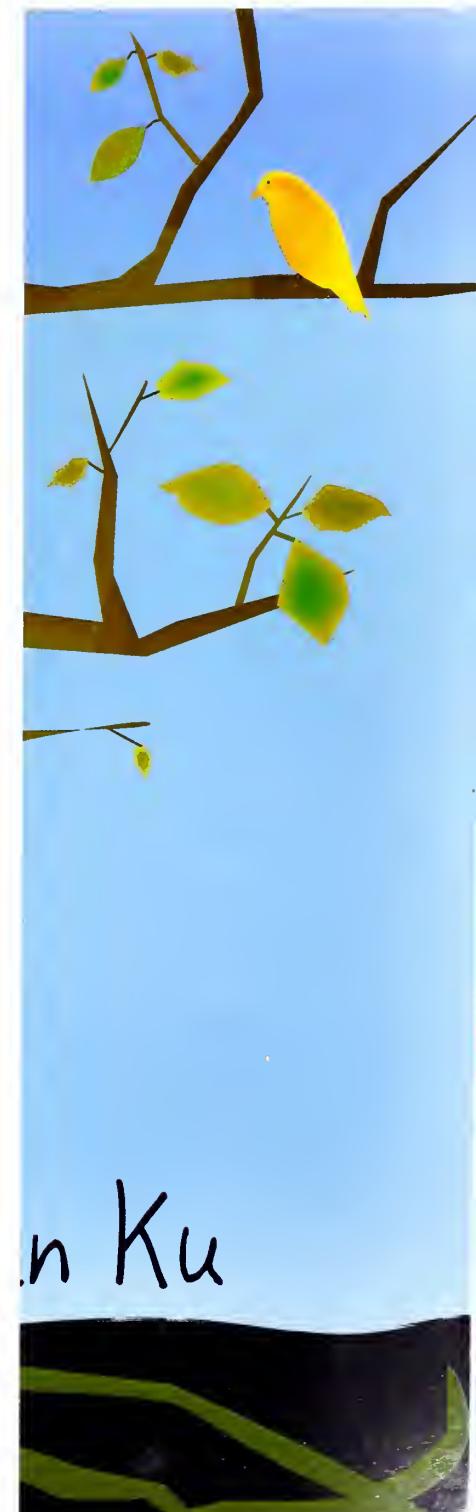
"I'm sure. You two just bring back a large enough catch to feed us all," said Marge.

Mark leaned over and kissed his wife on the cheek and headed out the door with his son.

"Dad, I'd like to take a peep inside that creepy old saloon before we go fishing. Who knows, I might find an interesting souvenir to take back home to show my friends," said Matt.

"Son, all of these old buildings are probably held up by one rusty nail. I don't think we need to be rushing off inside every building that we see around here," said Mark.

"Come on, dad, you're exaggerating. The buildings seem pretty sturdy to me, although they do look like they could use a little touching up," said Matt. Mark removed his cap and rubbed his damp head,



then put the cap back on. He gazed up at the blistering sun and finally gave into his son's request.

"Well, since we're out here on vacation, let's go see the saloon," said Mark.

"Come on, this should be exciting," said Matt as they approached the saloon. When they stepped upon the wooden porch, several of the boards squeaked upon each step that they made. A large saloon sign, which hung from a high beam protruding from the roof, swung back and forth in the warm breeze. A large cluster of spider webs hung down from each corner of the building. Pushing the double doors of the saloon open, they entered the poorly-lit building. Streams of sunlight struggled to shine through the tall, mildew stained windows on each side of the saloon. The room was filled with small tables and chairs. Many of them were toppled over and covered in dust. The wind was heard howling throughout every crevice of the edifice. Small spiders scurried off between the cracks of the broken floor, seeking refuge. Mark and Matt gazed around the room at the winding stairs leading up to the second floor.

"This place gives me the shivers," said Mark. He rubbed the goose-bumps and hairs standing up on his arms. Taking in a deep breath, Mark calmed his rising heartbeat.

"This place is definitely no Hilton," said Matt.

Mark walked over to the bar and sat down on one of the dusty barstools and gazed at himself in a large, cracked mirror behind the bar. "Bartender, I'd like a whisky!" shouted Mark. He slammed his fist down upon the counter. Matt was startled when he heard the loud pounding sound echo throughout the saloon.

"Dad, what are you doing? You almost scared the living crap out of me. I thought that this dingy old place was tumbling down on top of us," said Matt clutching his chest. Hearing this, Mark began to

laugh at his son.

"Dad, look, over here, check this out...it's an old piano," said Matt. He walked over to the dusty piano and removed several boards and old red velvet curtains covering it. Sitting down on a small stool, Matt struck several keys that were completely out of tune. A large scorpion crawled from behind one of the loose keys of the piano and raised its prickly tail and struck at Matt's fingers.

"Whoa!" yelled Matt. He snatched his hands away from the keys and jumped up from the piano.

"Now, do you see what I mean, there's no telling what's in these old buildings. Death lurks around every corner of this decrepit place," said Mark. As Matt pulled the dusty curtains back over the piano, out of the corner of his eye he caught an image of something moving around on the second floor. When Matt directed his gaze upstairs, his eyes landed on a fairly tall woman with long black, stringy hair. Her large, piercing green eyes that never blinked, stared down at Matt. Her pale skin emitted a slight glow in the dimly lit room. She wore a long, red dress with a white pearl necklace draped around her neck. In her hand she held a large bottle of Jim Beam whisky. The woman floated across the hall and vanished in the doorway of one of the dark rooms upstairs. Faint sounds of a conversation soared from the dark hallway. A cold, tingling chill ran up Matt's spine. The hairs on his arms stood straight up on end.

"Dad, I saw a woman running around upstairs... Did you hear the voices?" asked Matt.

"I'm sitting almost near you, how am I not supposed to hear it? Let's get out of this creepy place," said Mark. He hopped up from the barstool and headed towards the exit when he heard someone shout out, "Who was it ordered a whisky?" When Mark and Matt turned around, standing on the second floor was the strange woman,

and two men dressed in old western clothing. One of the men held the bottle of whisky up high and asked, "Didn't you boys order a whisky?"

"Yeah, but we were only kidding," said Mark. The man holding the whisky, wearing a black outfit and a wide brim hat cutting over the rim of his nose, slowly walked down the stairs.

"I think we got ourselves a small misunderstanding, boys. You don't go around this town orderin' whisky if you aint payin'. That's a dangerous way to live around these parts," said the man, slamming the bottle of whisky down on the counter.

"Look Mister, we don't want trouble... We're just here to look at some land, that's all," said Mark. Matt nodded in the background. The other man and woman also walked down the stairs. Flipping back his long, dusty coat, the man coming down the stairs revealed two silver guns secured inside two holsters wrapped around his waist. The man in black at the bar, leaned back against the counter and flipped open his coat as well, showing off his deadly hardware. When he grinned, his stained, yellow teeth protruded from behind his thin, parched lips. Only darkness was seen where his eyes belonged underneath his wide, black hat. The woman ran over to one of the men and pleaded, "Henry, please don't harm 'em like the others. Let 'em go this time for me." She held the man at the counter around the arm and gazed over at Matt.

"Look, is it money you want? Here's fifty dollars; just let me and my son outta here. Whisky can't be more than that," said Mark, handing the man at the counter a fifty dollar bill. The man studied the money, front and back. "Hey, what kinda trick is this? This money's phony!" shouted the man as he tossed the fifty dollar bill up in the air and pulled out his weapon and shot a hole right through its middle. The loud gunshot rung throughout the saloon as

Mark and Matt were stooped down with their hands over their ears. One of the men walked over to Mark and pulled his trembling hands from his ears and shouted in his ear, "We only deal in gold around here! Gold only, Mista!"

*They must be the killers the waitress spoke of,* thought Matt. Fearing for his father's life, Matt courageously lunged towards the man near his father and grabbed the man's gun from his holster and placed it to the stranger's head. He threw his other arm around the man's neck in a chokehold.

"I don't know who the hell you people are but I'll blow his damn head off if one of you move another inch...just one inch, that's all I need!" yelled Matt as sweat beaded from his forehead. When Matt pulled the man backwards, a strong death-like stench rose up from his torn, dusty clothing. When they made it halfway across the room, Matt pushed the stranger on the floor near the bar where his friends were. But he kept the gun aimed at them until he and his father made it to the front door of the saloon.

"See what I mean, Bobby, you can never trust local miners. They're all the same. They want to keep all the gold in these hills for themselves and share none with us city slickers," said Henry as he squinted his beady green eyes.

"Shut your big mouth before I send you on a dirt nap!" yelled Matt as he aimed the gun and shot out the cracked mirror behind the bar. "That's what you'll get if you try and follow us," said Matt. Mark and Matt ran out the door of the saloon as fast as possible. Gunfire followed them, but missed and struck the door frame. The sound of the piano playing, bottles crashing, and people laughing, filled the saloon once Mark and Matt made it out of the front door. Matt searched for the gun that was in his hand, but it was gone.

"What the—?" questioned Matt as he gazed wide eyed at his empty, trembling



hands. "The gun, I must've dropped it."

"Let's get away from this weird place," said Mark as they ran towards their vehicle.

"Dad, do you think that those were ghosts?" asked Matt.

"To be honest with you, I really don't know. My best guess is that they're local starving actors trying to make a quick buck off tourists. But I must admit, they're pretty damn convincing," said Mark. Feeling choked up and unable to hold back his true feelings and emotions, Mark began to cry.

"Dad, what's wrong?" asked Matt.

"I tried to hide this from you and your Mom, but I'm about to financially go under. Your grandfather's sickness and death drained my bank accounts, but I couldn't just turn my back on my own dad like his father did him. I spent all we had to make it out here thinking that this property would be worth selling to turn things around financially, but I was so wrong," said Mark gazing up at the sky. "I took a fool's gamble, just like my grandfather, and lost."

Matt was saddened and moved by his father's words and tears. But he knew that he had to maintain his own strength for his father's sake. Throwing his arms around his father, Matt hugged him.

"You're the greatest dad I'll ever know. I was truly blessed to have a father like you in my life. Don't worry about money, I've been doing a little saving of my own and I have about a thousand dollars on me so we could have a little fun before we leave California. I also have enough to get us home so don't worry. When I finish college and become an attorney, I'll put monies aside for you and mom so forget about this wacky place. Cheer up, dad. In time, we'll do just fine. Come on, let's go fishing by the river," said Matt. He wiped the tears from his father's reddened eyes.

"I guess you're right. Fishing just may ease my mind right now," said Mark as they walked towards their vehicle. When

they made it to the van, Mark and Matt pulled out their fishing gear and headed towards the river. The sparkling, winding river flowed over the hills behind the shack like an endless snake. As they arrived at the river, they saw a young woman and an old man, sitting near the river's edge. Matt chuckled when he noticed that the old man and young woman were dressed in western clothing and shoes.

"Looks like everyone around here's taking this western stuff a little too serious," said Matt to his father. They laughed amongst themselves before sitting down near the two strangers.

"Howdie," greeted the old man. He startled Mark with his squeaky voice, and grinned from ear to ear. The old man wore a wide, black hat that cast a shadow upon his wrinkled face and sea blue eyes. His white mustache completely covered his top lip and twisted upward into a winding curl. The lively young woman with him had red hair that flowed down her back like newly spun silk. Whenever she moved, her hair shimmered brilliantly in the warm sunlight. Her blue eyes twinkled like two polished gems. Her skin was almost as pale as milk. Matt wondered why the blistering sun didn't tan her smooth skin. Like a moth drawn to a flame, he was drawn to the woman's mysterious beauty. To gain her attention, Matt spoke, "Caught any fish yet?"

"I'm afraid not, son, just down here tryin' to pan for gold, that's all we're doin'," said the old man. He sensed that Matt was fond of his mistress so he intercepted Matt's questioning. The old man's snow-white beard hung down to his round belly. He swirled a tattered tin pan back and forth underneath the crystal clear ripples of the river water. Sand and water drained from the small holes at the bottom of the pan.

"Had any luck lately?" asked Mark as he baited his hook.

"Well, some years back, I hit it real big out in these hills. No doubt, it was the

mother load. Tons of fine gold came out of this old river for many months," said the old man. He laid the pan to one side and gazed up at the sparse clouds floating across the vast blue sky. "I can remember those days as if it was just yesterday. Gold came out of this old river and the hills in large chunks. A whole lot of people got rich back then."

"Those were the good old days, wasn't it, honey bunch?" asked the woman. She wrapped her thin arms around her lover's pale neck.

"Yeah, my darling, those were the good old days. I bought one of the shacks up on the hill some years ago. Several months later, city slickers read about the gold and came here in large numbers to try their hand at mining. Unfortunately, some of them were murderous thieves. Regardless, our small township was jumpin' in those days," said the old man. He smiled and wiped his damp hands upon his faded overalls.

"Stand up darling and let 'em see the dress I bought ya," said the old man. He gestured with his withered hands for his girlfriend to stand. She stood up and twirled about happily like a ballet dancer. The white dress coasted upon the warm, gentle breeze as the woman danced joyfully in the bright sunshine.

"It's really a nice dress," said Mark. He nudged his son in the side with his elbow.

"Yeah, it is rather nice, quite nice indeed," said Matt.

"My woman was the talk of the town during the high times of the gold rush. Today, the city aint nothin' but a ghost town since the gold practically dried up from the river. The only thing you can pull from this old river now is specks of gold a week, or a fish or two, if you're lucky," said the old man. He dropped his head and continued to pan for gold. Hearing this, Mark placed his fishing pole down on the ground beside his son.

"So, you're telling me that there's

little or no fish in this river?" asked Mark.

"I wouldn't put it so bluntly, son. The fish are there, but you just got to have the right bait to catch 'em with. Same thing with the gold, its here in these old hills, but you got to know where to look to find it," said the old man. He winked his wrinkled eye at Mark. The old man and his girlfriend got up and walked away.

"But, what's your name, Mister?" asked Mark as the two almost made it over the hill. Turning his head slightly to one side, the old man shouted! "Ebstein's my name." But the old man's voice was too faint for Mark and Matt to understand what he said. As he waved the old man and his lover off, Matt looked at his father and asked, "Weren't they the strangest pair you'd ever seen?"

"Son, these hills are probably crawling with weirdo couples like that. That hillbilly get-up that they were wearing was really hilarious. They could easily take their act to Hollywood and make a bundle of cash," said Mark as they laughed.

"Come on; let's get back to the shack. We've had enough of the locals for one day. We'll tough it out tonight and hit the road first thing in the morning," said Mark as he grabbed his fishing rod. When they returned to the shack, Mark and Matt leaned their fishing rods up against it.

"Marge, we're home!" shouted Mark. He pushed open the rickety front door only to find Marge in dire distress. With her bloody, right leg wedged down into the wooden floorboards, Marge reached out to her husband while in tears. Mark and his son ran to Marge's side.

"Thank goodness you came back early. I thought you'd stay all day at the river."

"My God!" yelled Mark. He grabbed one end of the long, rotted planks of floor boards and pulled it up until it snapped in half. Then another, and another, until Marge's leg was free.

"I stepped on a weak floorboard and



my leg went straight through the floor," said Marge. She cried uncontrollably.

"It's okay, baby. Don't worry, I'm here beside you," said Mark as he ripped off his white undershirt and wrapped it around Marge's wounded leg to stop the bleeding.

"I'm not gonna lose you to no damn, worthless shack!" yelled Mark. He embraced his wife in his arms. Matt peeped down in the hole where his mother's leg was. Dust and cool air rushed up from the hole.

"I sat our bags off to one side of the room and started to brush off the table when my leg went down into the floorboards. I swear that I never saw it coming. It was as if someone was pulling my leg downward. It's the weirdest thing," said Marge.

"I don't know what in the world my grandfather was thinking about when he willed my father this dangerous place," said Mark as his anger ignited once again. "Animals in a zoo live under better conditions than this. If my grandfather was living, I swear I'd give him a piece of my mind. This raggedy old shack is nothing but a worthless death trap," said Mark.

"Dad, I'd take back the worthless part," said Matt as he gazed beyond the settling dust, down into the gaping hole. Mark and Marge joined their son and cautiously peered over into the hole and were stunned at what they saw. Light from a nearby window shone upon massive chunks of gold neatly placed in hand woven bags and wooden crates.

"It looks like gold," said Matt. He looked around the room and saw an old pick ax sitting near the potbelly stove.

"Mom and Dad, stand back," asked Mark. When his parents moved back, Matt swung the pick ax like a maniac and busted up the remaining floorboards and widened the hole. It revealed a secret mineshaft filled with large chunks of sparkling gold. Mark and Matt climbed down into the hole to inspect the gold up close.

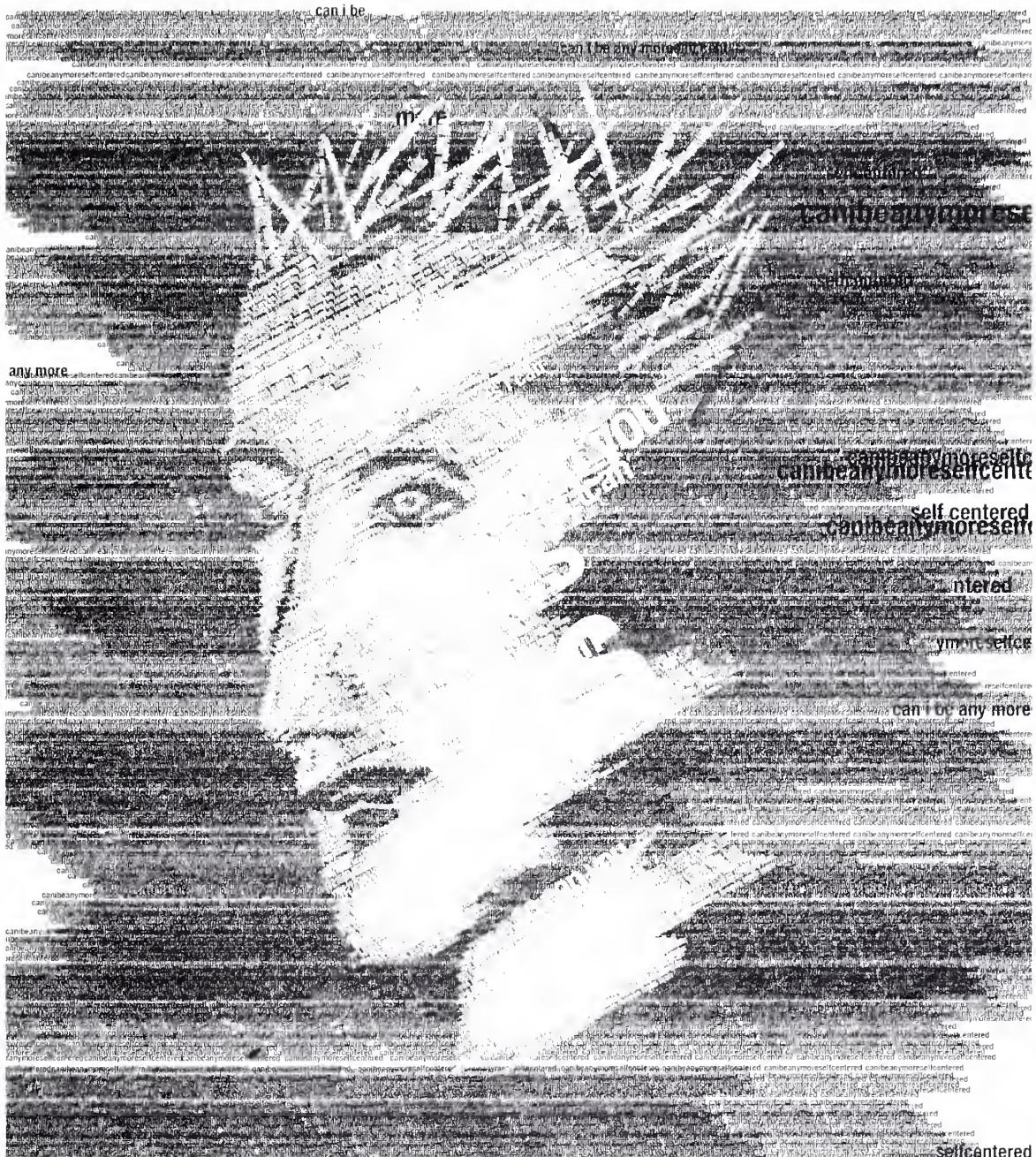
"I can't believe it, it really is gold.

This place is probably worth millions, if not billions of dollars! Son, we're rich!" shouted Mark. His voice echoed throughout the cool mineshaft. As they walked further, Mark and Matt came upon another old sign that read EBSTEIN'S PROPERTY. Matt pulled a lighter from his back pocket and lit an old torch covered in spider webs. He waved the torch out front, while his father continued on. Mark and Matt walked further into the mine and stumbled upon an old newspaper dating back to the time of the California Gold Rush. One article in the paper revealed that an old man and his female lover were both robbed and murdered while panning for gold near the river's edge. The description of the two was exactly as the description of the two people that Mark and Matt met earlier by the river. Mark read the article further and learned that the old man was his grandfather, David Ebstein. Holding up the newspaper, Mark showed his son the picture of the woman and man killed. Gazing at the paper, then at his father with his eyes stretched, Matt whispered, "That's the old man and the woman who sat at the river's edge. They were ghosts...we were talking to real ghosts." The hairs on Matt's arms, once again, stood straight up on end as he thought about the old man and his mistress.

"Look at this," said Mark, handing his son a later edition of the same newspaper with a headline that read, *Two brothers from the city of Chicago, and their female accomplice, were found guilty of killing two minors for their gold. All three were hanged for their brutal crime.* Matt threw the newspaper down on the ground when he noticed that the picture of the three killers resembled the people they met in the saloon. Mark gazed at the picture of his grandfather in the newspaper and whispered as he shed a tear, "Thanks Grandfather David Ebstein, thanks."

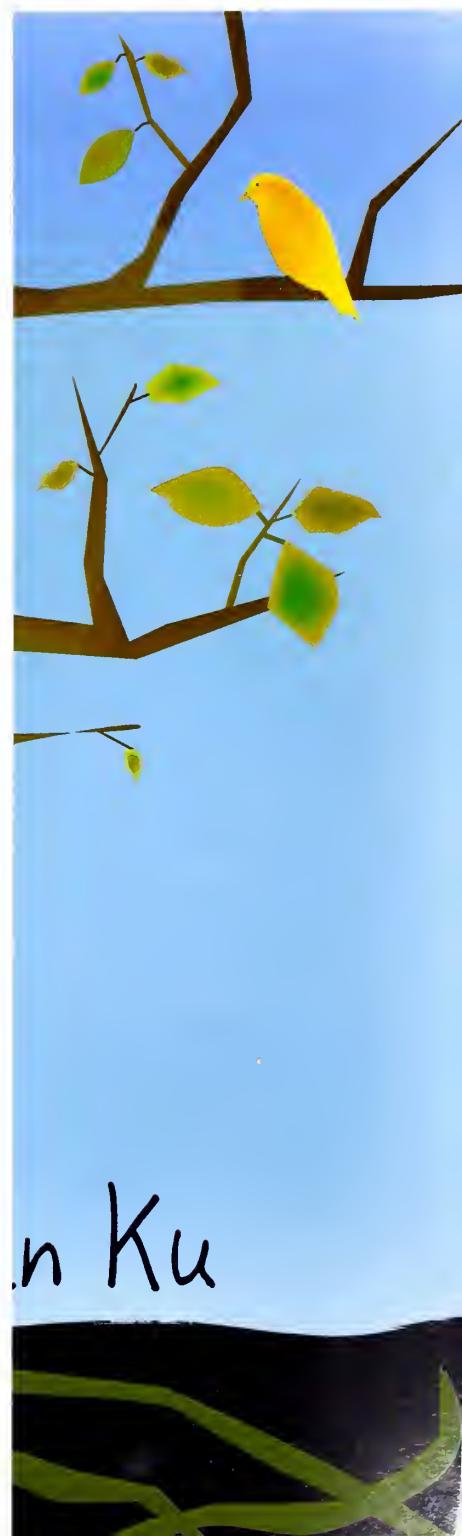
*Etheridge G. Lovett*

## Type Face



*Russell Martin*

## Typography



## *Phoenix*

And if I were to treasure you  
like the last skin of some  
wild bird  
would it be enough?

Would your feathers heal  
my scars?

Could I burn the stalks down  
to smolder and cast a resin  
that could stop alchemists' dreams?

Would it glint with dust,  
Pyrite and glass?

Would your heart and  
gullet and the  
bone of your jaw  
form a fetish  
that could bribe the boatman?

And when I am through  
would there be enough  
of you to rise  
and take flight  
to another sun?

*Jaysen Elsley*

*Rebirth of a Phoenix*

*Louis Orsini      Pencil*



*iris*

between flames of exposure, liquid sands  
feeding off our first touch  
i'm aching for your fever to swallow crimson trance

the residue of guilt and lust burning hands  
sweet sapphire pools of lips crushed  
between flames of exposure, liquid sands

the rust of fidelity caving as it stands  
still struggling for a radio wave to hush  
the aching for your fever to swallow crimson trance

in a victim's blood, we dance  
in a snowfall of twilight we crave so much  
between flames of exposure, liquid sands

the blade-sharp breath of our bodies' demands  
sinking into a cluster, a cinematic rush  
aching for your fever to swallow crimson trance

hearts gather, tangle, and rip apart this stance  
of killing him and loving you this much  
as the flames of exposure, liquid sands  
ache for your fever to swallow crimson trance

*Jennifer Stark*



.n Ku

*Alone?*



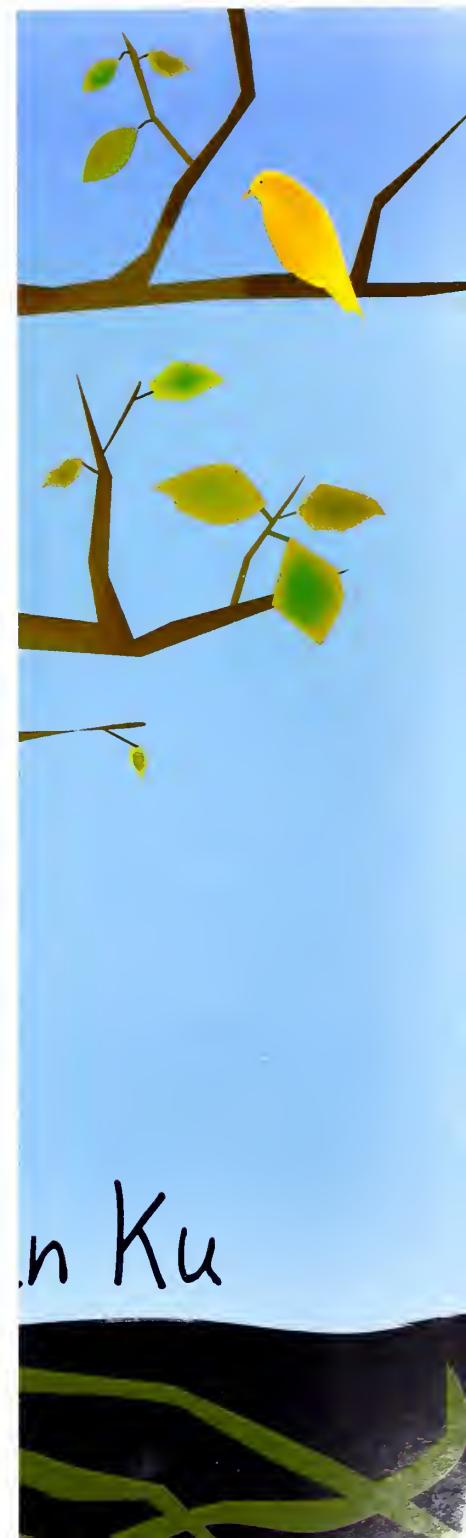
*Jayder E. Lebolo Black and White Photography*

*Orguidea*



*Andrea Jaeger*

*Pencil*



## *Thank You*

I stand up on this page  
Wielding the pen I hold  
As a live hand grenade

To conceive kerosene thoughts  
I paint the white walls black & blue  
Leaving everything I've sought  
Up to me and down to you

*Bryan Covet*

# P'an Ku Staff



Editor

## Larissa Nash

"There is no reality except  
the one contained within us."  
- Hermann Hesse, Demian



Designer

## Ana N. Navarro

"Whatever you can do,  
or dream you can, begin it.  
Boldness has genius, power  
and magic in it."  
- Goethe



Asst. Editor

## Lysette Taylor

"A dull life is one that is  
lacking in experience and  
emotions. And dull art is  
art that has no story behind it."



Staff Member

## Diallo Palmer

"We few, we happy few,  
We Band of Brothers...  
For he who sheds his  
blood today with me shall  
be my brother..."  
- William Shakespeare, Henry V



Advisor: Dr. Patrick Ellingham



*"Do not go where the path may lead: go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."*

*- Ralph Waldo Emerson*

*P'an Ku*

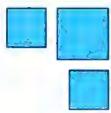
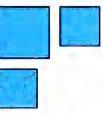
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Student Literary and Arts Magazine*



P'an Ku

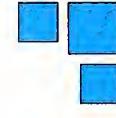
"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where" 

# P'an Ku



“A poet is a bird of unearthly excellence, who escapes from his celestial realm and arrives in this world warbling. If we do not cherish him, he spreads his wings and flies back into his homeland.”  
- Kahlil Gibran

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"Eyes"

Courtney Cabello



Silver Gelatin Print



## Deciphering a Crumbling Plea

The codebreakers refuse to  
rest until the team  
translates the bizarre  
secret language of the angel's  
face, its uneven contours  
traveling to a hidden  
alcove beneath her  
fragile heart.

Wandering through the  
maze, the team scratches  
into the crumbling  
marble walls.

(no respect for lost cities?)

"YES!"

This woman  
is an archaeological  
find!

Look at her silver eyes, her  
statuesque beauty; WAIT!

DO NOT SCRATCH HER FACE!"

Flee! Run past the four  
chambers, hide from the silent  
ghosts dwelling within  
all possessed women, for such ghosts  
devour halos  
and innocent  
inner children; AAAH!

(watch out for the boogieman?)

The codebreakers relinquish their  
souls, wrapping empty boxes  
with doubt. You see, within  
this room beneath the  
angel's heart, the  
demons milk soulless  
cows; "Look  
at my eyes..."

Larissa Nash



# Howard

(Inspired by the song by Rickie Lee Jones)

## 1.

The spirits of all her abortions had manifested themselves into the furniture of her tiny apartment. So when the rocking chair ejected her glass pipe onto the floor, where it shattered into pieces, Linda had to go to the kitchenette to fish a beer can from the garbage. On her way she stepped on a large jagged piece of glass. She hardly noticed, but she trailed blood to the kitchen and back to the living room. She sat on a stack of boxes, since she didn't like to sit on the furniture, and yanked the shard from her foot and idly tossed it aside.

"God dammit!" She said to the rocking chair, whose only reply was to stare back at her innocently. *I hate to smoke from a can*, she thought. She flattened one side of the can, lit two cigarettes for the ashes, and, with a safety pin, poked a small round series of holes into the aluminum. Then with a pen she poked a larger hole into the side of the aluminum for a carburetor. When there was enough, she made a bed of ashes over the small holes, and trying to control her shaking hands, put a good sized rock on top. As she put the mouth-hole of the can to her lips and clicked her lighter's flame on, the furniture gasped, like children who saw someone doing something bad.

"Quiet you guys," she said. Then the yellowish rock crackled and melted as the flame shot up and down with each deep inhalation. She held her breath for half a minute and then exhaled. She closed her eyes as the rush coursed through her, and she let out a gentle moan as if she were ecstatic in the arms of a lover. As soon as it passed she began to reach for another hit.

"Mommy," said the armchair, "you promised no

more."

"That's right, you did," said the scarred wooden desk. The sofa, loveseat, rocking chair, chandelier, and table lamp all added their various forms of agreement. Linda ignored them as she usually did and took another hit. Sometimes it was good to have them around during the day as she waited for her boyfriend Rick to come home from selling women and heroin. Mostly, though, she was doing drugs, and they always complained when she did. They loved her she supposed. After all, she was their Mommy. Since she couldn't keep them in real life, it was comforting in some way to have them here in spirit. *It is always good to be loved*, she thought.

Of course, it did occur to her that she was crazy. They appeared for the first time when she was at her worst on heroin with Rick. But he decided that they were going to clean up so he could get back to selling again. Rick cut her off so she drank more and began smoking crack again. They were still here, so she figured maybe she wasn't crazy. She had gotten used to them by now, but still she always sat on the stack of boxes or the one uninhabited kitchen stool. She didn't like to get too close to them, and while they sometimes comforted her, they also sometimes scared her.

She was out of rock and beginning to tweak a little. She headed toward the window.

"Mommy, I think there's cops outside," said the lamp.

"I think it's the dee-eee-ayyy," said the desk.

The desk was the only one she had named. She called him Pinocchio since she could tell he was a little boy and he was made of wood.

"I told you kids to stop that talk!" They were always adding to her paranoia, but she knew they were just babies and they picked up these things from her. She was looking out the window of her fourth floor apartment for James. He was not in the courtyard. Only the overgrown plants, stray

animals, and the drained brown swimming pool, which looked like the spot where a large rotten tooth, had been pulled from the ground. She looked past the fence and further down the street for him. She needed to find him. She was out of drugs and out of money. But James was sweet on her and always came up to work out an exchange. She hoped if she found him he wasn't feeling too kinky, as her behind still hurt from yesterday, but either way it would seem a small price to pay at this point.

"Where is he?" She muttered impatiently.

"I knew it! I knew it!" said the sofa. "She's looking for James to get more!"

"Oh, Mommy," whined the loveseat, "please do it in the bed since there's no one there. It's so gross!"

Linda agreed it was, but sometimes it just wasn't up to her; she was the one who needed something. As she searched left and right for James, she saw a little boy with a switch in his hand. He was running around frantically in the courtyard slapping the guts out of lizards with his stick. She knew this boy. He lived in the apartments somewhere. He was about nine or ten and his name was Howard. *Sick little gny*, she thought as Howard screamed triumphantly after nearly cutting a large brown lizard in half. With no sign of James, she began to worry and pace the room.

"Come sit down with me Mommy," said the armchair calmly, trying to soothe her. But Linda didn't listen. She had two cans of cheap malt liquor left in the fridge, and she would have to drink one now to calm down while she waited to spot James. She opened it, took a long pull, and headed back toward the window.

"Why don't you spend the day with us, Mommy?"

asked the chandelier.

"Yeah, I'm sorry I broke your pipe, Mommy," said the rocking chair.

*Mommy, mommy, mommy, mommy, mommy*, she thought. They were getting on her nerves again and right now she had no patience. She needed James and she needed him now. As she darted for the window she knocked over her makeshift pipe on the stack of boxes, and as she grabbed it from the floor she spilled some of her beer. She lost all patience.

"See what you've done now! Shut up! Leave me alone and just SHUT UP!!!!"

Her furniture/children all began to whine and sob, and she wanted to say she was sorry but she was too angry. At the window she scanned the streets for James. A noise from the courtyard distracted her. Howard had a small cat by the neck, belly up on the ground. It howled and Linda noticed the boy was poking its stomach with a knife.

"Hey kid! STOP THAT!"

Howard was startled and he let go of the cat, which ran away while the boy looked around to see who had yelled at him. Howard spotted Linda in her window and stared up at her, shielding his eyes from the sun.

"What's wrong with you?" asked Linda.

"Nothing. What's wrong with you?" asked Howard.

As they stood there looking at each other, Linda got an idea. She couldn't go out looking for James in this state, plus if anyone saw them going from the street to her apartment together and told Rick, she'd be in for a serious beating. But the boy could go out and look for James and deliver a message.

"Hey kid."

"What?"

"Can you take a break from the murdering and come up here a minute?"

"No."

"There's money in it."

"How much?"

"We'll see just come up here; I need you to run an easy errand."

"Which one?"

"Which one what? Errand?"

"Which apartment?"

"Oh, 406. Now hurry!"

2.

The kid started making his way toward the apartment. Linda needed another hit.

"Mommy, are we having a guest over?" asked Pinocchio.

"Yes, honey, we are, so everyone be good."

She got on her hands and knees and began running her hand over the carpet near the boxes. She found a piece of ceiling popcorn and cursed. She banged on the carpet with her flat hand and up jumped little pieces of debris, including a tiny piece of rock. She smiled at her good fortune, but just then there was a tiny knock on the door.

"The door. The door," cried the furniture.

"I want all of you to keep quiet while our visitor is here. Mommy has to concentrate now."

She ran to the bathroom and put the rock and the can on the toilet tank. Then she took a long sip of her beer, finishing it off with a small burp. She regained her composure and answered the door.

"Come in, kiddo," she said. The boy entered the apartment warily and stared at Linda.

"Whatta ya want me to do and how much do I get?"

he asked.

"Straight to business, huh? Your name's Howard, right?"

"Yep. Howard," he said.

"Well, Howard, I'm Linda and just as soon as I use the restroom I'll tell you. Sit there on that stool and I'll be right back," said Linda.

In the bathroom she lit a cigarette, took quick hurried drags and dumped the ash on the can. She smoked her meager hit, but it was better than nothing. She came out and Howard was sitting where she left him. He was an odd-looking kid. He looked old around the eyes and mouth. He reminded her of her brother when they were growing up, who was now dead from an overdose. Her brother was the same type of kid. He killed every animal and bug he could get his hands on and used to burn her with cigarettes. She didn't much like thinking about her brother, but now with this kid in front of her, reminding her of him, she felt a strange kind of affection toward the boy. She felt a little sorry for him.

"So Howard, why do you kill animals?" Linda asked.

"Why do you kill babies?" asked Howard.

"Who told you such a thing?"

"The chair," he said, pointing.

"That's my business, and I don't want you listening to any of them," she said, gesturing around the room. "I thought I told you guys not to bother our guest."

"They never listen," she told Howard apologetically. Now she sat down on the boxes and looked at Howard, forgetting for a moment why she had asked him here. He began to feel uncomfortable and looked away from her, squirming in his seat.

"So what do you want me to do?" asked Howard.

"Do you know the big guy who lives on the first floor? His name is James."

"You mean the drug dealer?"

"Who said he was a drug dealer?" asked Linda.

"Oh, please. Everyone knows that," said Howard.

"You're only what, nine years-old? What do you know about stuff like that?"

"I'm almost ten and a half," he replied. "Besides, my Dad visits him."

She was starting to feel bad for him again. He should be allowed a childhood, she knew how it was to be deprived of one. She felt this boy was very lonely.

"I need you to go find him and tell him to come up here and visit me. If you do I'll give you five bucks," said Linda.

"Okay, give me the five."

"How do I know you can find him?"

"I know where he is. He was heading to the park. He goes there every day. And besides you want your drugs don't you?"

"Hey, there's no need for that.

Don't worry, you'll get the money, I promise."

"Fine, I'll go get him," said Howard, and he began to get up to leave.

"Wait a minute." Linda's urgency was subsiding for the moment and she wanted to talk to the boy some more.

"I see you down there all the time killing things. What you were about to do to that poor cat was awful. Why do you do it?" Linda asked.

"It makes me feel better," he shrugged. "They can't hurt me, but I can hurt them, and it feels like something instead of nothing."

Linda understood. Drugs were the same, something to feel rather than nothing.

"Don't you have any friends?" she asked.

"No."

"What about your family, don't they love you?" She began to feel emotional after this question came out.

"My mom is dead," he said.

"Well your father, then?" she asked.

"Daddy touches me." Howard muttered, looking at the ground.

The children all gasped, and Linda's eyes began to fill with tears as her heart sunk in her chest. She caught her breath and spoke.

"I know how that feels, Howard." She hadn't felt genuine emotion in so long it was overwhelming.

"You do?" he asked with genuine interest, as if maybe someone understood.

"Yes, Howard, I really really do. It's horrible," said Linda.

"Why did you get rid of all your babies, didn't you love them?" Howard asked.

"I wanted to," said Linda. "Love them that is. I just don't know how, I think."

"I think you could have loved them," said Howard.

"Maybe, but who would want me taking care of them? I can't take care of anything. Not even me. But I want to. You know, someday. When I can be better."

"I would," he said. "Want you to take care of me. I mean, if I was your baby," said Howard.

"Why?" asked Linda.

Howard shrugged and said, "You're nice."

Linda began to cry now. That was the nicest thing she could remember anyone saying to her. She felt something that she thought could be like love towards this boy. She wiped the tears from her eyes.

"You remind me of my brother when he was a kid," she said.

"Was he nice?" asked Howard.

"No, but that's not the part you remind me of. I always wanted to be friends with my brother. But he wouldn't let me."

"I always wanted to have a friend too. Someone to maybe kill the lizards with or something. You know."

"Maybe we could be friends, Howard. I don't know about killing lizards together, but maybe you could come up and hang out with me sometime. You know, if you're lonely or something."

"Cool," Howard said. He smiled for the first time he could remember in a long while.

"Would you really want to? I mean, spend time with me?" she asked

"Oh, yeah," said Howard. "I like you. You're sad. Kinda like me."

Linda wiped more tears from her eyes, cleared her throat of sobs, and sniffed hard.

"You should probably be off if you're going to find James for me," Linda said.

"Yeah, I could use the cash."

"You can't come back today, but do you wanna hang out tomorrow, Howard?"

"Sure, Linda," he said, as he got down and headed toward the door.

"Don't kill any animals on the way," she said.

"Don't kill any babies today," he said and laughed a loud laugh.

Linda laughed, too. She stood lost in her thoughts after he shut the door. *This kid needed somebody*, she thought. She moved to the window and watched him walk through the courtyard and out toward the park. She decided she would be there for him from now on. She would stop smok-

ing crack tomorrow. That was no way to be a role model. Maybe she'd convince Rick to let her get back on heroin. She could certainly take better care of him on dope than on crack. She was resolved; they could both have someone to care about. She turned to the furniture with a smile.

"Hey guys, how would you feel if Mommy stopped using so many drugs, and started looking out for Howard for awhile?"

But the room seemed empty and there was no answer. The furniture did not speak anymore.



Geoff Baumgartner

“Interiors”

Andres Puertes



Silver Gelatin Print



"Clown Melissa"

Floresita Reyes



Black and White Photography



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## Regalito

Tres globitos en el cielo  
que se mueven sin cesar.  
Una cigüeña va volando  
en camino al hospital.

Entre nubres y arco iris  
encontré algo especial  
un pequeño regalito  
que el sol me quiso dar.

Ponte los zapatitos  
te susurré en el oído  
despídete de los angelitos  
y ven a casa conmigo.

Ya mamá nos espera  
con mucha emoción  
porque ella y yo te creamos  
uniendo el corazón.

Federico Pereira





“Scratched Memories”

Nico Aguilar



Black and White Photography





## The Ocean's Rim

Strolling along, the tepid air dancing in an endless stream,  
The granules of sand push up through my toes, bringing back memories of me.  
Longing for the crashing sounds, over and over again,  
Waves crest foamy white, as if floating on air.

Immense body engulfing the earth, sharing salt with thy mother.  
Father strikes midnight, time stands still along my path.  
Earthshine reflects off the water, celestial glow.  
The beating of my heart began here.

The rim holds in everything of beauty, I am but a single shell dancing.  
The silent underworld once untouched shares our violations.  
Tears falling add to the vastness of her domain,  
My tears add to the pain.

Laura Pustizzi

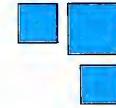


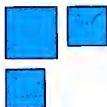
"jeans jacket"

Angelina Meneses



Pencil on Paper





## The Empress

I have been wearing you  
like an empress in new clothes  
feeling naked for months,  
feeling nothing,  
the way one goes about the day  
ignoring the feeling of clothes on skin.

I have been wearing your love  
like a yellow raincoat,  
a bright distraction from the storm,  
tears like raindrops splashing  
into puddles pretending happiness.

I have been wearing hurt  
like my armor-  
my heart encased in shiny links  
of metal; it hides behind an  
impenetrable shield,  
on the other side of a great wall.

Esther Martinez





## My Sister Remembers

We were reared with rough hands;  
loved with brutish words that  
sloughed away the innocent skin  
of our soft fruit  
leaving only cold dry pits.

Cowering in corners  
we accepted our punishment—  
reluctant soldiers  
in the army of all children  
repeating only to ourselves

over and over  
*It did not hurt.*

Esther Martinez



# Ode to My Father, My Brother, My Love

His afro is glorious!  
One billion black planets cradling each other,  
Growing outward and downward,  
Curling inward and upward,  
Connected in their quest for light—  
United!

His eyes are brilliant!  
The conduits of unadulterated compassion,  
The gaze of which assures the subjects  
Of their permanent and deserved  
Place in Heaven!  
Hallelujah!

His nose is strong!  
The bridge from aim to action  
Is broad in its efficacy,  
Flaring unabashedly to  
House all of his brethren!  
Come, brother!

His mouth is magnificent!  
Lord, his mouth!  
Lips full with ebullience unrivaled,  
Teeth sharp and ever-present;  
Together with every smile, every grunt,  
Every word, every poem,  
He chews up ignorance as his  
Forbears chewed through ropes of  
Enslavement.  
Wisdom emanates from his door  
Like collard greens on  
Sunday morning!  
Eat, brother!

His neck is powerful!  
The slope is rigid  
And joins his  
Mighty back and chest,  
Yea, mighty, to  
Push those in front and  
Lift those behind!  
Transport, brother!

His body is forceful!  
With pillars as legs and  
Petals as feet,  
He climbs mountains  
While the long noses of  
Hypocrites and Phonies  
Serve as his platform,  
Raising him to eminence!  
Hallelujah!

His skin is butter!  
Monday, cool, and yellow;  
Wednesday, warm and golden;  
Saturday, hot and burnt,  
But always making for better cooking!  
Amen, sister?  
  
Amen!

Nicole A. Grant



## The Transitions

Cold nights haunt my visions with distorted futures. I see the reality of wars and starvations, eradication of man on earth. This voice haunts me every day. I don't understand it, why does this voice talk of such horrific prophecies? I have no one to tell of what I know. Alone, I am in this vast region of nomads. I live on the second floor of a 20 story building. My apartment has one bedroom, two televisions and a toilet that sounds like a ticking time bomb lest you shake the handle a few times to quiet the hiss. This is the only noise that keeps me company. The silence keeps me sane though, at least kept me sane until this voice started to illuminate the depths of my mind. I have lived in this city all my life. I try to understand if it is a concrete jungle or a concrete prison. I enjoy asking myself these questions while watching the white collars walk through the streets like mechanical robots. I also observe the time efficient atmosphere of a species impatient to die. The marvelous structures are soiled with the past of hardworking immigrants, money hungry moguls, heaven bound congregations, and homeless minds. They then become metamorphic structures that turn into cell blocks and insane asylums.

I haven't left my apartment in days. My mother must be worried about me. There I go again, worrying about who's worried about me instead of worrying about me. Months could have gone by and I wouldn't have known the difference, for I was not part of that world anymore. The world so involved in saving time, so involved in reminiscing of the better days, or so involved in killing time, which has manifested in the wars of this age,

There goes that voice talking to me, telling me things that bear no origin in my mind. I need to get out of this apartment I think I am suffering from cabin fever. I left the apartment about 6:00 A.M. Hoping to get some answers I

went through the city searching...

I first went to a part that had 20 chess tables set up near a pond. The chess players there studied the art of strategy day and night. There weren't any serious games being played so I took a challenge with an old Chinese man. The man eyed me as I sat down and prepared myself for the mental war that chess involves. The game started off real slow and uninteresting, but as our pieces ran out of defensive positions, things got interesting. My opponent, Mr. Lui, began crushing my strategy. Move after move, Mr. Lui created a lesson from which to shape an allegory of life. "The pawns are like decisions," he said, "every little move creates an exacting outcome."

"But Mr. Lui, does this mean that every decision we make defines the future?"

"For many years I have contemplated this reasoning, young Cervantes; only you will find the answer to this question." We kept playing, but in silence. I was trying to grasp all that had been said. As the game drew near its dramatic ending, Mr. Lui made an astonishing move. He trapped my King in the corner and then said, "All the power that protects a King cannot stand against an army of pieces whose moves are precise and deliberate."

I left the park with more questions than I came with. My mind began to wander as it often does. As a result I kind of wandered aimlessly through the city not paying attention to where I was going. When I finally broke out of the trance-like state I was in, I realized I was in the slums of the city. Trash was everywhere, homeless minds rested happily on the bus stop benches and street hustlers lurked on every corner. I decided that part of my search, for whatever I was searching for, had drawn me into this part of town. Something was waiting for me; I couldn't explain it, I just knew it. Then, I suddenly felt a necessity to rest my feet. And that's when it happened. I will

never forget this moment of my life. You know that moment when you change the way you view the world, or rather the way the world views you. I walked towards a bus stop bench that was worn down from rugged travelers. I sat down without the slightest awareness of my surroundings.

"Excuse me sir," I turned my head to see a man speaking up to me from behind the bench where he was previously fast asleep.

"Yes," I replied.

"Couldn't help it, but seems like something is on your mind." Was it that obvious that even strangers could tell I was saturated with thoughts?

"I only wish I knew what that something is," I said.

"You know there was a time where I was consumed by questions of my life and my existence. I went mad trying to find the answers. I lost all my physical possessions just to get closer to my thoughts, and here I am still looking. There comes a time where you have to realize that what you are looking for, Cervantes, can only be found within you."

"But what about everything that's out here in the world from which one is to learn from? What about the different cultures and their beliefs which claim the knowledge of the world?" I could not believe the conversation I was having with this man whose roots were deeply imbedded in the jungle concrete. It was like jewels of life were being dropped in my lap from the most unexpected source, a source stereotyped as being the trash of society.

"Cervantes, learn from my mistake. I fell for the fools' gold, the intangible. Part from your search and retrace the steps of your life. There will be serenity in the path of self."

I parted in silence and hopped on the bus. There was much to learn from my walk through the city today. Mainly I was just going to go home and start over. I decided to make changes in my life. I was not going to mope around the house anymore and avoid certain responsibilities. Not working in weeks was one of them. Ever since I quit my job last month things seemed to have transformed. The job was getting stressful, so I did what I always aspired to do, I quit. I didn't even have a new job set up. A baby crying in the corner of the bus disturbed the thoughts I was having. With each second the wailing of the baby sounded louder and louder. It sent chills up my spine. As I looked out the window to catch a view of the city from the bridge, I noticed a police chase up ahead. The baby had stopped crying, and but I felt like crying now. I was looking at a red Ford Mustang coming directly towards the bus. The driver was trying to lose the cops, and, as a result, the bus that carried my soul was now carrying another 50 souls to a watery grave. The view must

have been spectacular, a bus of 51 passengers traveling through the air and into a murky river.

Why didn't the voice tell me that this was going to happen to me? Why did I waste my last afternoon trying to find answers if I was now only seconds away from finding them out? Why was the voice prophesizing about war, starvation and eradication of man on earth? Then, a poem came to mind in the midst of my final hour. I remember writing it last month when things were kind of lost to me. I liked to write just to organize my thoughts about whatever. The poem was called "The Graceful Becoming of Life":

Light Engulfs the soul as you are conceived into this

---

brilliant world. For the earth turns as you breathe in every second of being. Trees turn color for every season as a child grows different in size and in thought. For mother nature is the healer of flesh and God is the renewal of the soul. Become one with this earth and become deeply embedded in the soil of life. For fear not the end. It is only the entering of a heavenly dimension that becomes another brilliant beginning.

I was now questioning this traditional idea of the end. What if I was wrong? I hope I am near the truth because it would be sad to face nothing but darkness. Then one thing came to mind as the bus took its shocking dive into the river. The man at the park, Mr. Lui, had said something very interesting when we sat playing chess. He said, "Every little move creates an exacting outcome." My unseen mind had made all the decisions to search through the city today, to ask questions and seek answers. I wonder if unknowingly I was searching for the "what was meant to be" factor. After all, it was my hunger for knowledge and unsettled ambition that moved me to my present life-threatening situation. At least I won't have long to wait, I have been under water for 7 minutes now. I guess it was true what that book *The Perfect Storm* said about drowning. The brain does not die immediately when you drown. You are physically dead, but the brain runs on automatic for a little while. Could this be what happens to the soul after the carcass of an individual withers away? This is weird; I consciously know I am going to die. Just like the prisoner who faces the death penalty, or a woman who is to be stoned, or even a soldier who is in a fox hole without ammo and troops.

juan Gonzalez



“Apple Demographic”

Kristen Garcia



Black and White Photography

## Movin' too fas' (Poetry in Patrois)

Ay! Slow dung! A wha di rush?  
Wha mek yaw cry chil? Hush!  
How cum yuh nuh si say life lush?  
A wha yaw wait pon, di golden touch?

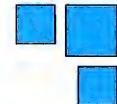
Ay A wha all di cumotion fah?  
A wha de mek all disya naize in yah?  
Nuh mek mi lick yuh, mek yuh bawl fi yuh moomah

Scheewzz, yaw was'e a time mi can baddah.

Mi tiad fi tell yuh fi wa'se yuh time.  
You n'haffi tek up nuh life a crime.  
Yuh neva once listen to mi, mi wud nuh wut a dime

Now yuh whole life a one big pantomime.

Yuh tink me sorry fi yuh? A pity yaw look?  
Everybody mus' get the judgment book.  
An' since yuh choose di life af a crook,  
Jus' gwaan yuh ways, prison ago be yuh nook.



## Moving too Fast

Hey slow down! What's the rush?  
Why are you crying, Child? Hush!  
Why can't you see that life is lush?  
What are you waiting for, the Golden Touch?

What is all the commotion for?  
What's making all this noise in here?  
Don't provoke me to hit you, you'll cry for your mother

(Hiss teeth), You're a waste of time, I won't bother.

I'm tired of telling you not to waste your time.  
You don't have to live a life of crime.  
You never once listened, my word isn't worth a dime

Now your whole life is one big pantomime.

Do you think I'm sorry for you? Do you seek pity?  
Everyone must be judged accordingly.  
And, since you choose the life of a crook,  
Just go away, prison will be your nook.

Nneka T. Asiamigbe



“NOW THAT'S GNGSTR”

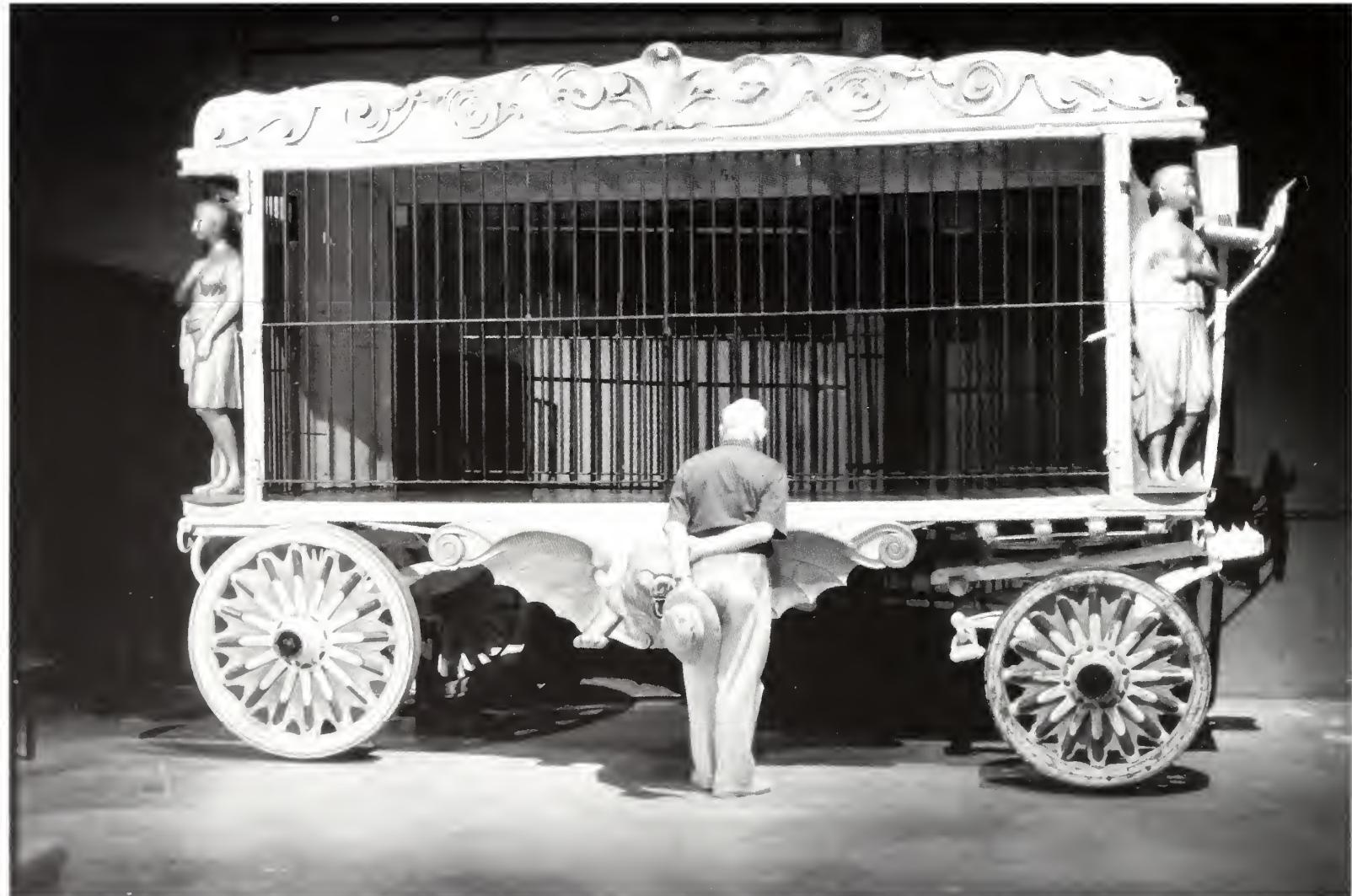
KILL (Kapone Is Ill)



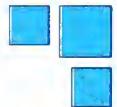
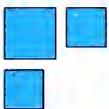
Color Marker on Paper

“Sarasota, Florida”

Maria Fernanda Quintero



Silver Gelatin Print



## Time's Asset

We are time's greatest asset,  
We give color to the monuments of yesterday,  
We are the bearers of a symphony that flows through the waking dawn.

We are the breath of freedom that the present begs for,  
We are the dream that the future can barely hope to contain,  
We stand at the bow of nature,  
only to walk away with its drowsy eyes hanging on us.

Keith Greenberg





## Seven

as if we could lie naked  
under the stars  
under the fixed asphalt moon  
passing cherries  
from mouth to mouth  
kissing  
tasting  
punctuating the death of berries  
stolen from vines  
feeding like the cold water  
hits the stream of  
glass blown screams

as our dreams become cheaper  
as rhyme passes the time  
to become a fellow player  
in this game  
of feeding heart to heart  
blood to bone  
boiling the fractured image  
the violins out of tune  
the feeding  
feeding  
feeding

and  
you and i  
are only fixed on the taste of each other  
drenched in the cherry cider scene  
of sex  
sex  
sex

and we can pretend  
to pertain  
to rewrite  
the fiction eyes  
as we drink our play of death and stone  
sing our careless play of rhyme  
as the berry wine drips  
as purple lips sink closer  
and closer  
to  
you and i  
playing careless  
thirsty  
full of hunger  
and the need to breathe  
the skin of temperatures  
too high  
the height  
strung on candied kisses  
listen  
  
you and i  
are  
only  
one too many  
like these trees that dance with the moonlight  
i quiver and shake  
with the death of each blossom  
each kiss is an echo  
of stolen mist  
we crave the raptured heart  
to eat  
in the silence  
the silence  
this silence...

Jennifer Stark

“Untitled”

Laura Peterson



Digital Photography



## Scorpio

and this is what i'd speak of you  
if words didn't lock like  
lips twirl  
tongues settling on craving  
setting  
the distance  
slitting throats of  
lust  
lost  
sluts  
behind

this is what i'd breathe of you  
if captured could  
liquid thoughts  
found lost  
within  
skin  
where i'd swallow the sky  
of blood bone thieves  
we'd call sense  
and beg for more

and this is what i'd feel for you  
if types of twisted tongues  
could shake in spirals  
and enrapture the blur of a night  
sinking sullen swirls  
of swollen thighs

how i'd rush like  
sweet screams  
collapse inside of your skin  
how i wish i felt  
something

maybe when mine can  
twist and tune the teeth of  
bitter burnt lips  
and flip the blazing fear  
crush the hips to ashes  
like all that shimmers  
and fades

like you give to  
take away

if i were only  
as good as my words  
can lie  
and dance this page  
in screams of bloodshot sky  
sketching  
murder to murder  
blood to bone  
lacing lashes to quiver  
shiver skin like i'd crush  
faultless saints  
to halos down  
spinning the spines of tongue

if only  
i were as good as  
my words can spell

this vacancy  
this loneliness i feel  
without you...

if only i could live up to  
this shade silhouette  
of fading beauty  
this mask of rosy cheeks  
and fire eyes

if only my lips  
were as clever  
as the scrolled page  
and didn't look like  
swollen caskets  
of all that i want and  
will never be said

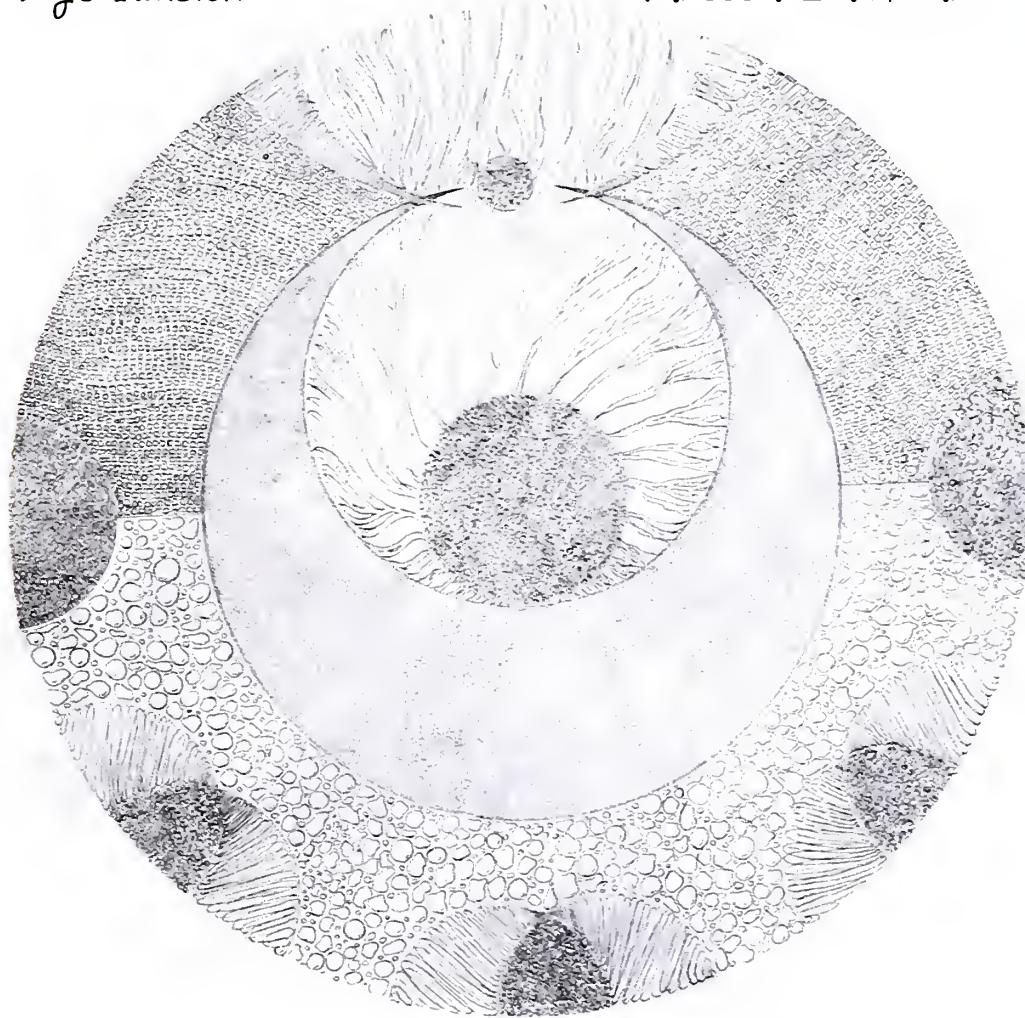
if only i  
like this page  
could illuminate  
with disdain  
could speak the fever  
that i'm burning here

without you...

jennifer Stark

### "Eye Illusion"

Vanessa Zambrano



Pen and Ink

“Purple Palms”

Aleksandra Vystavnoy



Digital Photography

"Untitled"

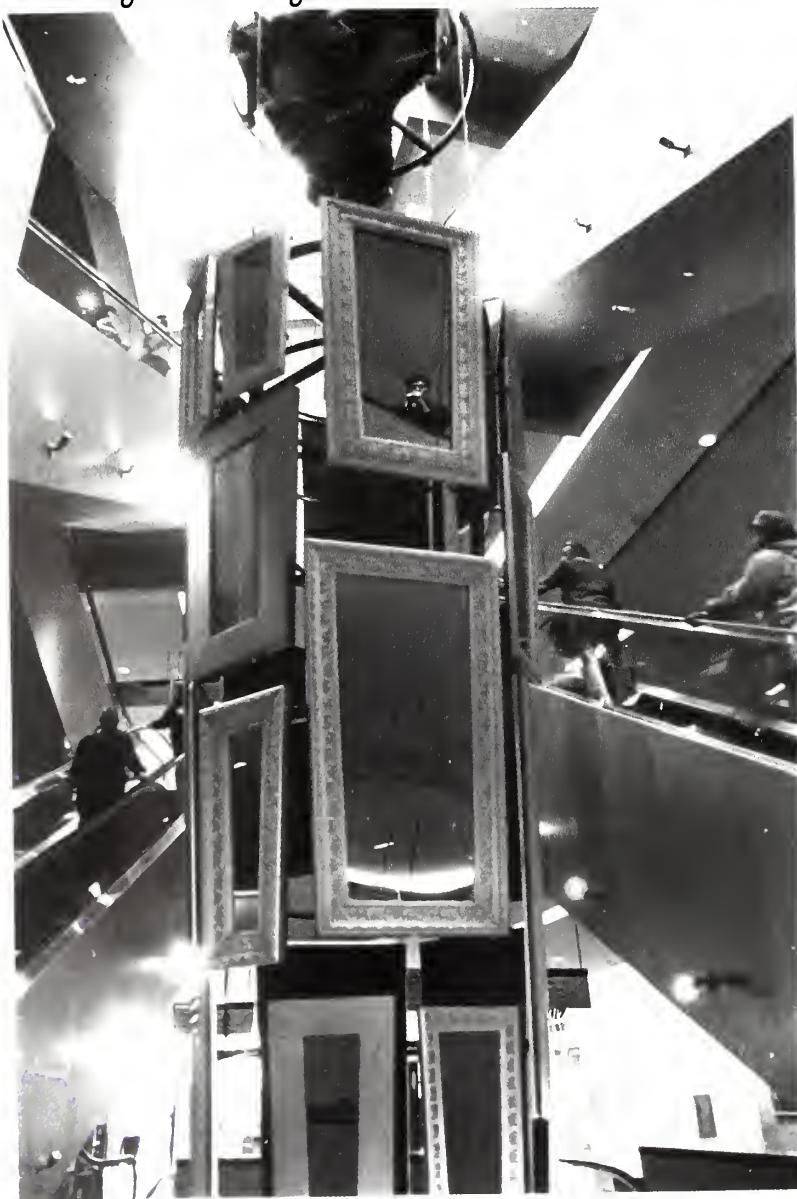
Laura Peterson



Digital Painting

“Coming or Going”

Roxanne Smith



34

Black and White Photography



## Debut of the Northern Lights

Aurora glides down  
the spiraling  
constellation, elegantly  
attired in her  
shimmering gown of  
10,000 tiny galaxies.

Slipping suddenly,  
Miss Borealis tears  
a black hole into  
her train as she stumbles  
down the stars, falling  
into the arms of  
handsome Mr. Ozone,  
causing QUITE  
the scandal among  
the bored angels flittering  
about the celestial  
parlor!

Larissa Nash





## Stand for the Night

The rhythm, carnal and true  
like drums beating the bossa nova,  
hands slapping; one, two  
against taut skin,  
like a woman from  
the west coast, Hollywood sign  
lit like the moon, its light  
falling on us making this  
like the dream it should be,  
like fairy dust and heaven.  
Except our haloes are tarnished and  
the dust is cheap glitter,  
but just for the night we can  
forget the truth which is like  
a shadow, harder to see  
in the dark.

Roxanne Smith

"Self Portrait"

Floresita Reyes



Hand-colored Black and White Photography



## little chocolate hearts

Chocolate feels like love.  
Is that what they say?  
I understand this when Sean sits to my right  
unfolding foil in his fingers  
little hearts in his left hand.  
One by one they disappear  
the foil unfurls, crinkles, loses its smooth heart shape;  
come to know the feeling of flat and empty  
wrinkled like an old dress.  
He tosses the hearts into his warm mouth  
but does not notice them dissolving  
back into powder, milk, and sugar;  
sweetness and bitterness parting-  
settling on separate parts of his tongue.  
When he's had enough  
he sits back on the blue-black leather of my couch,  
rolls the pieces of foil up between his fingers  
and flicks them across my coffee table like marbles.  
I watch out of the corner of my eye  
pretending not to watch,  
thinking all the while  
about that love-like quality of chocolate...  
how when the sweetness starts to melt,  
the bitterness can sometimes travel  
to the back of your throat and choke you.

Esther Martinez



"Forks"

Courtney Cabello



39



Silver Gelatin Print

“Monsters”

Elena I. Paredes



Acrylic, Color Markers, and Pencil on Paper

## A Portrait

Take the exacto blade kissed by my heart  
the blood is on your hands, I fear tomorrow  
because if I die, the world ends  
but you will never know  
all but a memory, learn to forget.

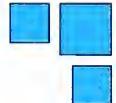
The afternoon has died, the sun has retreated.  
The trees dance once more in the blood red horizon  
humble roars of a fleeting train, veins in which cars drive in  
all muted for just a moment, life is silently paused  
the simple thought of you, catastrophic disaster occurs  
you are the invincible Armageddon and you've destroyed my world  
but as long as my lungs sample a breath of air, I yearn for an ending.

A portrait soaked from the tears of my heart  
still and meaningless, it screams out love  
I am the artist, and you are my heartwork.

The sky is gray, the rain has stained my footsteps  
with only the thought of you, the sun seems to shine  
blinded, haunted by uncertainty, your voice is my guide  
waiting to hear from precious lips, nervous sweat drowns me.

The scent of dead roses insinuates my everything  
hidden in shadows, petals fall silently  
falling like furtive tears hidden within my heart  
the heart you held, the heart you stole, the heart you didn't want.

Richard Kline





## North Campus wRites of Spring Winners

### Smile and Say Fromage

The therapist studies my face intently while giving me instructions. I am to prepare a list of words that remind me of my mother in some way. He tells me that the words don't have to mean anything to anyone as long as I know what they mean. He leaves the room, giving me privacy, promising to return in a few minutes.

My mom is sick with lung cancer. It was my dad's idea to come to therapy, and I don't think it was necessarily a bad idea. Plus, I know that if I skipped this session, my younger brother would follow suit, and I get the feeling that he needs more help than I do.

Trying not to cry, though I've heard crying is popular in this type of setting, I write down random thoughts and phrases that come to me while picturing her once healthy face. I fill the entire front of the paper easily and decide that continuing onto the back would be pointless, so I wait for my doctor to return.

Not too long after I completed my list, he comes in and asks if it's okay for him to look it over. Agreeing, I hand him the paper and stare at my shoes, trying to keep myself from crying and biting my fingernails.

He glances down the list, nodding, as if it all makes sense to him. He asks me gently if I would mind sharing with him what some of these words mean, and I shrug in response, as if I don't really care.

The first word that he wants me to explain was a simple word: cheese. I smile at the memory that the

everyday dairy product brought to me. My mom always liked the French language and bragged about taking a class in high school. Unfortunately, she used to tell me the only word she could remember from class was the French word for cheese. It was so silly, just the thought of her slipping *fromage* into random conversations.

The therapist hears my explanation and pretends to be pleased with a simple fond memory, but what does he care? He doesn't know my mom. It won't really bother him when she dies.

The next word he questions is "Chinese." He arches his thick eyebrows, and, without giving me time to respond, he concludes that my mother is "oriental." She's not. I laugh at him, which he doesn't like. Settling down, I tell him that this word has more than one meaning.

The first meaning is an inside joke, started long ago. Riding in the car, I misheard something she said to be a Chinese name instead of a simple phrase. When I repeated it, my brother and mom started laughing at my honest mistake, faking Chinese accents. Since then, whenever the three of us needed to laugh a little bit, we would use Chinese accents, for no other reason than we sound completely ridiculous.

The second reason was a tattoo that I had gotten on my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Mom flipped out, like many parents, when I admitted that I had gotten one, and she asked me what they meant. With half a smile, I told her that my tattoo means "I love my mom." She shot me a nasty look, calling me on my

obvious lie. She never did get around to liking my tattoo.

The last term the therapist wanted me to go over was "prom." Prom was just last night, and hadn't gone so well, which is why I look absolutely exhausted. I only had two hours of sleep before this appointment, after all. That wasn't why I had written prom down on my list, though. When my family found out Mom had cancer, seven months ago, I was already worrying about Senior Prom. Even while she was sick, she took me dress shopping, and more importantly, she promised she would be there to see me off. Maybe such a promise was never hers to make, but nevertheless, she had kept it, and that meant so much to me.

\*\*\*

My mom passed away that night, during my turn to watch her. My one friend marvels that Mom died the night after she satisfied her promise to me. I am not a superstitious person, but she is, and swears that my mom's promise was the only thing that kept her going for so long. I should have made her promise to live until I turned 90.

That was nearly two years ago, and I still have the list of seemingly random words I wrote for the therapist. I keep it in a safe place, and I look at it when I feel that it's getting harder to remember things that used to come to me so easily. She was too much of an influence in my first eighteen years to be forgotten. It's the little things, like cheese, that keep her close to my heart and fresh in my mind.

*Erin Craig, 1st Place*

## *Holiday*

Latin rhythms of merengue and salsa electrify the tiny kitchen. Side by side, Mama and I prepare for the holiday feast of an assortment of traditional Puerto Rican foods passed on from my grandmother and hers before her. Each prepared dish, from turkey stuffing flavored with green plantains to sweet creamy custard flan, evokes cherished memories of years past shared with those we love. Stories are told as the room swells with the deliciously intoxicating smell of Mama's special seasoning.

"Grandma would cook for the eight of us kids and still have enough food to invite close friends from church," Mama began, "I don't know how she got it all done..." Mama told of how the laborious process would start at least two days ahead of time, allowing for savory meats to marinade, crusty breads to rise and bake, and hearty stews to simmer. The festive meal was no easy task, even with two helpful daughters, for she had six rowdy sons to cater as well. I could just imagine it: Edward chasing Antonio down the long narrow stairs because Antonio stole from Edward's hidden stash of baseball cards; Samuel and Daniel teasing Ruben about his new crush on the junior high's new English teacher; little Joel playfully enticing the orange-cream colored cat with tattered rope and string; Grandpa lounging in the family room on the circular red plush couch watching Spanish news coverage with the volume loud enough to drown out the sounds of chaotic children; and of Grandma, Nilda and my Mama

peeling lumpy potatoes, dicing pungent onions, stripping bubbling gravy, frying sweet "platanos," and adding finishing touches to the well-dressed dinner.

"It really is too bad Diana's missing out on this! I know she loves holidays at home," I say to Mama. We both share a sense that something's missing without my sister here. Diana is stationed in Alaska at Elmendorf Air Force Base. Hurriedly soaping up and rinsing the fresh squeezed lemon juice off of my hands, I dial Diana's dorm number and put her on speakerphone. Mama, Diana and I reminisce and laugh about the holidays past when Diana was the dessert queen, baking up more than we could ever finish off ourselves: chunky chocolate chip and (my favorite) white chocolate macadamia nut cookies, sticky pecan pie, marshmallow/ streusel topped apple pie, rum cakes that made us ask if she wanted cake with her rum, and Diana's favorite, a Dominican version of dulce de leche cake, an angel food cake layered with rich caramel topped with vanilla frosting. My brother Nicholas joins in the conversation and mentions how he misses Grandma's oranges, a simple dish, but we'd love to sit with her kids, watching her peel the orange from beginning to end without breaking the rind, while she sang old Spanish lullabies. Momentarily, a somber mood befalls us while recounting our thoughts in silence. Paramedic sirens blare; Alexander races around the corner of the decorated table on his ambulance ride-on toy. I raise my son off the little seat and nuzzle his neck, covering his soft chunky cheek with kisses, including him in the traditional talk.

Moments like these passed down through the years are like old familiar friends come to visit. I cherish each one and encourage my family to never let the memories die. Now that I have a child of my own, I hope to keep these traditions alive and share the family's past with him so he may share with his children and theirs after.

**Nicole Molino, 2nd Place**



## The Importance of Story-telling in Dominican Society

"I will tell you something about stories...They aren't just entertainment...They are all we have....to fight off illness and death. You don't have anything if you don't have stories. (Leslie Marmon Silko, epigraph to *Ceremony* 1977) Though Ms. Silko is not a Dominican, this quote aptly summarizes the importance of oral tradition, or story-telling, in Dominican society. A tradition which is deemed so important in our society, that during our independence celebrations there is an annual competition called conte, or story-telling. Story-telling played and continues, though on a minuscule role, to play a pivotal role in the daily lives of Dominicans.

The history of oral tradition in Dominica and by extension the Caribbean region can be traced to our African ancestors. It is a generally accepted fact that oral tradition has a rich foundation in African culture. Through stories, the memory of Africa was kept alive and many life lessons were taught to the children of the slaves. These stories were subsequently passed down to future generations. Many generations of Dominican and Caribbean youths know of Compere Chien, Compere Cochon, Compere Tigre and Brer Anancy, characters rooted deeply in African oral traditions.<sup>1</sup>

Many traditionalists contend that technology has damaged tradition for ever. One such tradition which has been irrevocably damaged is the art of story-telling. No longer do parents or even grandparents relay stories to their children to pass on life's lessons in colorful language. The television, the internet, portable radios and compact disc players have replaced the art of story telling. Story-telling was a way of bringing the family and, by extension, the neighborhood, close. There were a range of issues which were discussed. They were stories about integrity, lethargy, and a wide range of stories from the occult.

I remember vividly from my own experiences during the years 1979-1980. I was a mere youngster when the worst hurricane in the island's history, Hurricane David, struck on May 29, 1979. For approximately eight months there was no electricity. Children had no access to television and parents had to provide after dinner entertainment to keep their children happy. So, every night, neighbors would gather together and share stories. Stories dealt with the struggles of adults during their youth, riddles, jokes, and, when the kids were supposed to be snugly asleep, hardcore adult jokes.

Fond recollections also come of moonlit nights. Such nights were highly anticipated, just to sit in the moonlight and for a couple of hours leave the worries of the world behind and simply regale in story-telling. The adults would cook a variety of food. Popular choices included broth with smoked meat and dumplings or roasted breadfruit and sautéed salt fish. Somehow, the better the story, the more delicious the food tasted. Nothing could beat good food and a well woven story in the language of our forefathers.

The language of story-telling is probably the most critical factor in the recitation of the story. The language used and still widely used today for story-telling is Patois.<sup>2</sup> Many people strongly contend that the Creole language (Patois) is the best for story-telling and more importantly for humorous anecdotes. To them the Creole language has a certain rhythm and cadence that Standard English can never achieve or duplicate. It is for these express reasons that during story-telling competitions the basic requirement is that the story be told in Patois (Creole) or a derivative of the English Language known as Cocoy. Anna Linzer says it best in her novel, *Ghost Dancing* (1998): "She told it in our language, that's when it was best. Some words just don't translate to English. A lot's lost."

Death and disaster have the unique ability to do what no conference on fraternity can or what innumerable sermons have failed to do: bring people together. In Dominican

society, death primarily brought people together for a wake. Wakes were an accepted part of life prior to the arrival of morgues and the subsequent refrigeration of cadavers. During wakes people would pray and drink coffee and rum while they stayed in the house of the deceased where the body would be. In such situations story-telling was of paramount importance. The master story-tellers would have to ensure that the somber gathering of people would be duly entertained for the entire night. At these occasions, legends were born, as these orators would compose grandiose stories of the deceased to elevate his or her stature in society, a sort of an unofficial eulogy. At these gatherings heroes of the past and our numerous folk legends would come alive as these masters of story-telling would weave their grandiose tales. However, do not allow the gravity of the situation to mislead you, humorous anecdotes were found in great quantity.

Currently, all social situations in Dominica lend themselves to story-telling though not on a large scale like in the past. Whether it is a wedding, funeral, christening or any like gathering, story-tellers can be found in an unofficial capacity.

From the age of slavery, through colonization and presently in this generation, the importance of story-telling cannot be underestimated. Story-telling served and continues to serve a myriad of purposes. From informal education to comic relief, story-telling has touched every facet of Dominican life. According to a folk saying, "rich man, poor man, beggar man, and thief" have all enjoyed or participated in this tradition. It is sincerely hoped that the advent of technology would not erode this priceless tradition because story-telling is an integral part of life. It binds people together while teaching priceless life lessons African writer Chinua Achebe says it quite nicely in his novel, *The Anthills of the Savannah* (1987): "The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns and directs us."

## Citations

Linzer, Anna "Ghost Dancing" Picador ® Pan Books Limited 1998

Agatucci, Cora. African Story Telling October 6, 1998  
<http://www.web.cocc.edu/cagatucci/classes/hum211/afrstory.htm>

<sup>1</sup> Creole titles meaning Brother Dog, Brother Pig, Brother Tiger and Brother Anancy (Anancy is a spider)

<sup>2</sup> Patois is a French dialect spoken in Caribbean islands which have French ancestry. Dominica was once briefly colonized by France. Patois is also referred to as Creole in other areas of this essay.

## Lester Telemaque, 2nd Place



## My Last Will

2016

"Nwaka! Ifreeka! Nyoka! Where's my Indian bangle!? You've all been playin' with it all morning! I told you all to put it down —now it's missing! Where is it? Somebody better answer me before I grab that belt and—"

"Mommy, it's not me!" Nyoka had tears rolling down her face as she denied her involvement in the misplacing of my family heirloom. My three children were all passed five years old, and I had just decided to tell them of this bangle and its significance in our family. Now it was nowhere in sight and I was so upset that I decided not to bother telling them anything.

2054

I'm watching over my three children as they gather at the reading of my will, and I'm waiting to hear their responses. Nwaka, the eldest and my only son, is standing at the door making certain the right people are entering. He is still the dutiful usher he always was for me —bless his soul. Now I bet those girls are still primping up for the occasion.

My lawyer and dear friend, Hamilton Roach, is shuffling his papers nervously as he always does before any event. I'd always told him it makes him seem less professional than he really is. Poor man. I wonder if his wife ever tries to help him behave less clumsily. That little witch! I bet she just grins and bears it as the loot rolls in. I'll see you in hell —or wherever— Lorna Roach.

They know my favorite flowers are roses. Why is the room filled with lilies? I've only been gone a month and they're already getting out of order. I ought to appear in someone's dream to talk about that. Maybe Ifreeka's. She always pretends not to be afraid of anything. Maybe a small visit will calm her down for a while —oh, there she is! She's

so beautiful in that red dress I made her.

"Nwaka, any sign of your other sister?" Hamilton is trying to look outside over my son's head. He'd have it easier trying to climb Mount Everest.

"Nyoka's never on time for anything in all her life. It took Mom two extra months just to get her into life." Chuckles fill the room. "She's coming now, walking as if she's carrying our next breath of air. I never knew why Mom thought she needed a third child. Nyoka's a mistake." Nwaka looks disgusted as he sits at the table. Thank God everyone knows he loves his sisters dearly and that he's acting like a jerk because he's still grieving. After all, he was closest to me of my three children.

"If everyone will please be seated comfortably—"

"Now wait just one minute, Mr. Roach," says Nyoka. "I just got here and haven't had a chance to greet my brother and sister. Besides, what **everyone** do you mean? It's just Mom's dog and us four. I'm sure she paid you very well, so let's go at a comfortable pace, thank you." She gives everyone a kiss.

It just tickles me to see her like this —always attempting a grand entrance. Ha-ha-hah! It's so hard for anyone to be mad at her for anything she does. They know by now how she can be a drama queen sometimes.

Ifreeka now breaks her silence, "Hmm-hm. Now that Madam Pompadour's chest is clear, can we get on with it?"

### Later that day

As I look at Nyoka, I know she's asking herself why I only left her half-an-acre of land and a small box wrapped in brown paper. I see her eyes well up with tears and overflow as she opens the box. I am pleased she obeys my request and is alone to read my letter in the box:

*My Dear Nyoka,*

*I know we haven't always agreed on many things. I know that if I were to tell*

*you that even with half-an-acre and a box,  
you are my wealthiest beneficiary, you would  
not agree. Nevertheless, it is so, my child.*

*You see, the bangle in this box, which  
was lost when you were a child, belonged to  
my great-great-great-grandmother. She was  
an indentured Jamaican slave from India.  
Now, if you do the math, you'll realize that  
it's way over two hundred years old.*

*Before she died, she gave it to my  
great-grandfather. He married the daughter  
of an African slave and they had fourteen  
children. To avoid a rift over who gets the  
bangle, he requested that it be given to his  
first granddaughter. That first granddaughter  
was your Aunt Ivette, and you know she  
died when she was only eighteen. So my  
grandmother kept it for her first grand-  
daughter—and that was me. My mother  
gave it to me when I got married to your  
father.*

*You may wonder why I chose you.  
The reason is that you were the only one who  
always obeyed when I asked you all as chil-  
dren never to play with it, even though you  
never knew its true value. And remember  
that time when your brother lost it and you  
cried for a month and refused to stop looking  
for it? Well all those things showed me how  
obedient you were then, as you've grown up  
to be even now, and how passionately you  
could care for something. I knew you were  
the only one who could protect it and keep it  
in our family for years to come. So when I  
found it in the tree house, I vowed to keep it  
for you. It's been in my safety deposit box*

*ever since—known only to Hamilton and  
your father.*

*It is now worth so much that if you  
sell it, you could purchase that ten-acre lot  
for sale beside your half-acre—and still have  
a hefty retirement fund. That decision is  
yours to make, but I'm guessing you won't  
sell it.*

*You see, not only are you financially  
wealthy, you now possess the greatest por-  
tion of your roots, which I have kept and  
protected all these years. And on your half-  
acre, you also inherit the rich soil, which is  
fertilized with the bones of your ancestors.  
Please see to it that I am buried there too,  
thanks.*

*I hope you will accept the responsibil-  
ity now bestowed upon you and keep our  
family's heritage alive through this bangle.  
Only then will my soul be at peace. One  
more thing, since I'm watching over you as  
you read, and waiting to move on, can you  
please send me a sign that you understand  
all that I have written...?*

Nyoka looks up—right at me—and smiles.

Nneka Asiamigbe, 3rd Place



"Op Art"



Kelly Amber McGee



Acrylic on Canvas



“Self Portrait of an Artist Reflected in a Spoon”



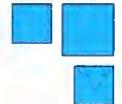
Alla Parsons

Pencil on Paper



50

## On Its Last Legs



My mind is a ball of clay haplessly shaped by this pretentious world  
In which a child is produced by a woman whose husband is sterile  
In an exceptional imitation of the Virgin Birth when  
Lurking in the background is her silver-eyed, secret, "special" friend  
Whose estimable nine-inches of hard, tender, sweet comfort  
Awakened her dormant feelings and a sense of self-worth  
That had been suppressed for far, far too long  
But now burst free like a sparrow erupting in song  
Resulting in a gray-eyed replica of the friend behind the scenes  
Gray eyes that the unsuspecting new father passed off to mixed-up genes

My mind is wandering through the valley of the shadow of death  
With Al Queda on one side and anti-terrorists on the next  
As shouts of "You are either with us or you are against us!" echo through my brain  
While parallel to that are the images of the innocent children that were maimed  
In the fight for truth and liberation and justice  
But the matter of the oil escaped no one's notice  
However we all played the devil's advocate and went along with the war  
Then later on questioned where on Earth the weapons of destruction were

My mind yearns to be an individual yet I still remain part of the throng  
Trying to prove to others that I don't dance to the tune of society's song  
I am not one to succumb to the conventional way of things  
I've been known to turn a deaf ear when society starts to sing  
Now my mind's come to realize that rebelling seems to be the new "in-thing" to do  
And everyone else is shaking and gyrating to anti-society's rules  
Since when could something so right just suddenly go left  
I'm not only lost in the crowd but feeling bereft  
Of a sense of purpose and something to march for or believe in  
I might as well have been dead however my mind keeps on breathing

Alisha McDonald



## Reality

Sitting alone in her living room, Courtney stares at the television screen. It's not on. Her thoughts are creating a program much more vivid and alive than anything a producer could come up with. It's a program that is fraught with drama and despair, but only in her eyes. Anyone else would see it as a dream of the triumph of love, but to Courtney it is a nightmare.

The air is musty from her cigarettes. An ashtray overflowing beside her shows the hours she's sat here alone. A glass of Coke, never sipped, drips condensation over her coffee table. At some point the television had been on, her usual escape from reality. She couldn't tell you anything of the plot or the characters if you asked her. She can't even remember the title. She remembers crying, though. She cried when the lithe blonde fell into the arms of the tall, dark, handsome lead. Fictional people she knew all too well. And now here she sits. Her eyes are vacant, but she sees many things. Joshua's life with Erin, his perfect girlfriend, is playing in her mind like a film. And Erin really *is* perfect. Kind and charming...the sort of girl you'd love to hate, but can't.

Joshua has been Courtney's best friend for many years. The two have been inseparable, even at times when they lived miles apart. There wasn't one person who knew Courtney and didn't know Josh, or at least felt like they knew him for all she talked about him.

It was six years ago when she realized she loved him. They were camping at a state park, just strolling through the woods and talking. He stopped to tie his shoelace, and when he stood up he looked at her. He didn't say anything, just looked.

She blushed at the way he stared without speaking. It made her a little uncomfortable. This was a time when their friendship was still young, and they were not used to the

long, silent moments that they share so often now. He smiled before he turned away, and her heart beat wildly. That's when she knew, but she could never tell him. The cost was just too great. There was no one in her life who could keep her happy like Josh could, and she refused to lose him because of a silly crush. The pair took a liking to a different person every week, and they would tell each other, of course, and laugh. She never told him the way he made her feel that night.

But tonight Courtney sits in her living room, lighting another cigarette and waiting for the phone to ring. He's going to call again soon. He left several messages over the past two days. She never called him back, which she is known to do from time to time, but now it's with a purpose. Erin has been the other girl in his life for six months now, which is probably the longest he's ever been in a relationship. Courtney knows that he loves Erin. He told her that he thought he might. She prayed to forget that she ever heard him say it, this little confidence that he opened up to her, his best friend. It scared her to death. She has spent a fair number of nights cursing the name of this girl who she's forced to share his affection with.

The message yesterday morning chilled her.  
"Courtney, call me right away. I have something I need to tell you, and I want to be sure you're meeting me tomorrow night. It's important, honey. I need to talk to you."

They had discussed going out tonight last week, with Erin, so all three of them could have one last night out before Josh moved to Boston. He was offered a great internship with Globe, an opportunity that he can't afford to lose. He leaves in the morning. It would be terrible if she didn't see him before he left, but she couldn't take it anymore. This is the first time she's ever felt like the third wheel with Josh. Trying to figure out just what he meant to her proved only one thing...that she loved him more than her own life. She couldn't live without him. Knowing that Erin was the one

who got to hold him made her ill.

She stopped to think of men who had come into her life through the years, the ones who never measured up. They stayed for more than a couple of months. It was obvious that her heart had been taken long ago. The only men who came to her now had no thoughts of loving her. She was a target for the scavengers, and on occasion she allowed herself to be their helpless prey. Frequently, in the most recent years, she began to loose hope, and surrendered to everything love did not stand for.

The phone rang.

Courtney picked it up from the table beside her but did not answer. His name was illuminated on the screen. She darted at it as it rang. What was she going to hear if she answered it? That he proposed to Erin? That they ran off last night and got married? She dropped the phone and slipped into her bathroom. The tears poured from her eyes, but she didn't wipe them away. The mirror reflected a grotesque picture of tangled, dull hair, pallid skin, and mascara dripping down from her brown eyes. She leaned against the cool glass. He leaves tomorrow, and he'll leave missing Erin, not her. He probably won't even think of her once he's been in Boston a while. Then one day she'll get a card in the mail that says, "Please join us to celebrate the marriage of Erin and Joshua," and she'll be in this rank little apartment, alone, dwelling on the dreams she can't help but keep in her consumed heart.

Well, it doesn't matter how much she loves him, that's one wedding she will never go to. He probably won't even wonder why she isn't there. He'll be too busy in the glow of his beautiful wife. They'll honeymoon in New York City and have maybe two or three children before he even thinks of

*It was obvious that her heart had been taken long ago....she was a target for the scavengers, and on occasion she allowed herself to be their helpless prey.*

her again. No, more like five. Josh always talked about having a big family. She could hear the phone ringing again from out on the living room floor. Forget it. She crawled out of the bathtub and went to turn off the cell phone. Then she climbed into her bed, tears soaking the pillow under her head, and fell asleep.

She woke with a start. Her head was aching from her evening of selfish misery. With bleary eyes, she wriggled out of her bedclothes and into her robe. Someone was banging on the door. Her bedside clock read 1:16. It was still dark.

She stumbled into the living room and opened the door. It was Josh. His face was red, and beads of sweat dripped down his forehead, nestling into the deep lines that lead down to his furious eyes.

"What are you doing? Why aren't you answering your phone?" he bellowed. "I leave in the morning and...wait...have you been sleeping?"

Her tears welled up again, and she stepped aside to let him in. She sat on the corner of her couch, folding her legs underneath her tattered robe while he paced across her living room in his irritation.

"What are you doing, Court?" he asked, calmer. "Why haven't you called in two days?"

"I've been...busy," she mumbled.

"Busy? It's Sunday night! I know better than anyone else that all you do on the weekends is sit on the couch and watch movies. I'm here most of the time!"

"You haven't been here in weeks, Joshua. You don't know anything about what I do."

Josh winced at the sound of his full name. She only used it when she felt annoyed. He sat next to her on the

couch and picked up her hand. Her heart ached as she felt it in his.

"Courtney," he said. "Nobody knows you better than I do. You're ignoring me. Why? I won't get to see you for a long time once I leave. Didn't you want to spend my last night home with me?"

"Yes."

"Then what is it?"

Courtney forgot her pain and was gripped with annoyance. Then she fired.

"Being around her makes me want to puke."

Josh's eyes flew open wide. He choked back a laugh and squeezed her hand. Surveying the room, he drank in the scene. Make-up was smeared around her eyes and pillow lines ran across her face. He turned and picked up a glass from the table.

"Court, do you ever clean? Look, you've got Coke running all over the place. How long has that been sitting there?"

She wrinkled her nose and turned away from him, unsure of what to say. She was frustrated and anxious.

"Okay," he said. Resignedly, "So Erin makes you puke. Why is that, exactly?" Courtney was still as she thought about her answer. Which would be worse? Losing all these years of perfect friendship for a chance at perfect love, or keeping the friendship knowing that painful longing will always be a part of it? She wiped her eyes, but the tears had run out. This chance may be hers, but his voice caught in his throat. He composed himself and smiled.

"Courtney, honey, you really need to learn to return people's calls."

Her heart skipped a beat. "Why's that?"

"Erin and I broke up on Friday. It wasn't right. She was pressuring me to make a commitment to her before I left for Boston. I think she was expecting me to propose. But I couldn't do it. You know this internship is important to me. It

could be my only chance to have a great career, to be able to support the big family that I always wanted. I just didn't want to go there and have to worry about her being here, waiting for me, when I don't even know how I feel about her."

He sat on the couch again. His hands were trembling.

"I needed to talk to you. I couldn't ..." he paused, swallowing. "I couldn't make a decision until I saw you."

Courtney jumped when his fingers ran along her face. She froze during his revelation, and new thoughts were spinning through her mind. This closeness, his touch, had opened a window she longed for.

"I know what you're doing now," he said softly. "I see the pictures. It's all like a show in your mind."

She chuckled as she leaned toward him. No one knows her like Josh does.

"In my show you're not leaving for Boston. That's why I prefer my fantasy to the real world," she said, her lips moving in. "But this...no fantasy could ever replace this reality."

*Kimberly Bracewell*



"Self"

Melissa Marrero



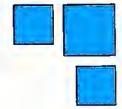
Graphite



"Rung"



Jason Gros



56



Silver Gelatin Print

## Crying Ghosts

We walked along the dirty and rocky road. The white dust swirled up behind our sixty-five year-old grandmother and clung to us as we struggled to keep up with her. Visiting Grandma was the most unpleasant part of our summer trips to Oklahoma. My eight-year old sister and six year-old brother were less adept at hiding their displeasure than I was at thirteen. Trips to Grandma Bee's house meant taking a bath in a metal tub standing up, trekking what seemed like a good ways to the wood ramshackle that housed our voids; and, we were finding out for the first time, it meant three-mile walks just to get a bag of chips and pack of bubble gum that Alexander was looking for. Looking at Margaret and Alexander's tired faces, I pitied them. I'd had four years to get used to doing number two in a pail when it was too late to go the outhouse, four years to get used to no air conditioning, and, after four years, a flyswatter in my hand was like a sword in Zorro's. They were too young to do without the discomforts of our modern suburban home, or, at least, the comforts in the home of our other Grandmother, NaNa, who lived just ten miles away in the "city." I had been born in Grandma Bee's house. Not that I remembered it; we moved before my first birthday.

Grandma Bee walked faster, not looking back to see how far behind we were. I wonder if she doesn't like us. She seems to treat our cousins a little better than us. With them, her voice is a little lighter and chores aren't as readily commanded. Perhaps her attitude was due to strained relations between her and Mom, maybe she felt abandoned. Maybe she saw us as young kids full of privilege and empty of

appreciation for the hands that helped build the crumbling house that we slept in at night. I picked up Alexander and said sharply to Margaret: "Hurry up!"

Passing a large farm, we saw chickens and horses and oxen and vast amounts of land. Close to the barbed wire fence is a horse with his head to the ground and his backside almost touching the wire. Alex exclaims: "The horse is going to fart on us," resulting in an outburst of giggles from Margaret and me. As if it hears us, the horse raises its head and looks at us with large alert eyes; it was a beautiful creature with a brown glistening coat. The belly hangs low, telling of a horse overfed, but, looking at the legs, one knows this is not a lazy horse. Possibly, it had been overfed after years of dutiful service. The long black tail hangs gracefully as the ponytail of an accomplished Spanish dancer and its grace stops my laughter.

We walk interminably before the orange and red beacon of the Kwik Stop signals us. Grandma instructs us to pick out one dollar's worth of chips, gum, candy, or soda. Margaret and Alex find their strength and set off to grabbing handfuls of one-cent gums and candies. Grandma wipes sweat from her brow and drops her red handkerchief. As she leans over to pick it up, I think of the horse and how close in size her hips are to the horse's. I stifle giggles, remembering Alex's remark.

"Yeah, Albut, deez here Bessie Mae's kids. Dey come from Floida. You ain't never seen dem, have ya?" Grandma Bee doesn't have any teeth and her grammar is at sharp contrast with what is said in my home—with what we are taught at the advanced school we attend.

Albert smiles at us and asks Grandma if she is keeping

us the entire summer. "Nosuh. Bessie Mae and Nicholas, has her husband, wanted to have some fun, so dey sent dem up her wit me." She turns toward us and asks if we are almost done. I grab two waters and two orange sodas and place them on the counter next to the mountain of pink and purple wrappers.

As we leave the store, I hand Grandma Bee a bottle of water. She looks as if I am handing her a cup of ammonia.

"Here, Grandma, drink this. You didn't get anything to drink and it's not good to walk all this way with nothing to drink."

"Pshaw, girl," she chuckles, "I done walked lot mo dan dis and ain't had no water." The chuckle turns to outright hearty laughter.

Smiling as best I can through my confusion, I continue holding the water out to her. After a few seconds, she opens the water and says, "All right. Das all right."

After the first mile, Grandma picks up the pace and my siblings are no longer satisfied with their bubble-blowing contests. Alex starts crying that he wants to sit down. I am too tired to pick him up right away. Grandma looks back at him, still walking, and laughs. "Y'all don't do no walking down there in Floida, do y'all? Hah!" She turns back around, never losing stride.

Picking my brother up and pushing my sister forward, we resume our walk. We walk quickly and soon catch up with Grandma. A low rumble sounds from behind, and as I turn to look, a horn honks three times.

The electronic click of the doors unlocking hangs in the dusty air---three clicks sounding like the rifle of the hunter who kills rabbits and possum behind Grandma's house.

"Ida! Idaaaa!" A shiny blue Cadillac with a white top slows down to a cruise alongside us. An electric window lowers revealing a woman wearing a lot of makeup and air conditioning blowing the curls of her wig to her face.

It looks as if Grandma has stopped but she has just slowed a little. "Hello, Josephine. How you?"

"My, what beautiful children, These your grandchildren, Ida Bee?"

"Yeah, deys mine. Dey's Bessie Mae's kids."

Still holding Alex, I stop and motion unnecessarily for Margaret to do the same. This woman has come to save us. She is the most beautiful woman we have ever seen.

"Ida, come on now. You can't have these kids out here like this. Come on, children. Get in with Aunt Josephine." The electronic click of the doors unlocking hangs in the dusty air---three clicks sounding like the rifle of the hunter who kills rab-

bits and possum behind Grandma's house.

Now Grandma really stops. Looking straight ahead, "Naw, Josephine. We's just goin up yonda. Thank ya kindly, I'll see you Sundy at chuch."

I've tried to be patient but this is outright mean! She hates us. Why would she refuse the ride of this kind woman? No wonder Mom and Dad moved to Florida. No wonder Mom married a "cit" boy. Sane people don't live this way.

The woman smiles. "Yes, Ida Bee, you will see me at church on Sunday. Goodbye, children." The car speeds off, sending clouds of smoke in our direction.

I sit down with Alex and place him next to me. Margaret doesn't take long to follow suit. Let us die out here. I bet Mom and Dad won't send us out here again. It never seems as if they're happy when we come out to Grandma Bee's anyway; it's more a sense of obligation than anything else. She probably won't even notice that we're not behind her, and even if she did, she probably will be glad to be rid of us.

The sky is still blue and the sun is still shining. I don't know exactly how long we've been gone but I figure it will be getting dark before too long. Dried tears and veins of sweat make the white dust on my siblings' faces stand out. Crying ghosts.

Their two orange sodas gone, I give them each a drink of the little water I have left. A shadow emerges, and when I look up, I only see Grandma's huge round hips. That's all she's got going for her. She's run off all her kids and she can't speak well. So she's got big hips to walk her everywhere. I laugh out loud, wanting her to hear that we can laugh at her, too. We Floridians laugh and laugh and we speak well and we have shiny Cadillacs and indoor plumbing. Our house has fresh coats of paint and our bathtubs are large and luxurious. Flies and bugs have no home in our domicile and Kwik Stops are on every corner. We go to the movies every weekend and can watch them at home with our cable television, too. Every move in our education is designed for our education is designed for our future attendance at a prestigious college—all of this to avoid your fate, old woman. My laugh says all of this...

Dried tears and veins of sweat make the white dust on my siblings' faces stand out. Crying ghosts.

Grandma looks at me so intently that I think she may strike me. I realize she is looking at me with pity. "Come on, y'all. Les git."

She makes a turn down a dirt road that we haven't gone down before. She was holding out on a shortcut the entire time. We walk past broken down house after another, all no better or worse than Grandma's. But the grass is long, green and plentiful, contrasting sharply with the rotted gray wood of the houses. Soon, the high grass turns to high, white tombstones—crooked and haphazardly spaced—like the teeth of the people buried there.

Grandma walks to the end of the cemetery and does an about left.

"Das yo Granddaddy ova yonda." She points at a tall white tombstone engraved, "Elmer Forsyth, Husband, Brother, Father." For the first time in all the time I've been around Grandma Bee, she looked worn-out. Exhausted. Resigned.

"That's your husband buried there?" Margaret asks. I have never thought to strike my sister until now.

"My husband? My husband? Das yo granddaddy. Das yo Momma's daddy." Grandma Bee's voice rises in volume and timbre.

Margaret starts to cry. Grandma hesitates and then goes to hold her. She holds her tighter and rocks her harder as Margaret's tears continue to run. The tears wash away most of the white dust—exposing her beautiful brown face.

Grandma opens her mouth to describe Grandpa to us. He was a tall imposing man even though he was lean. I saw a

picture of him standing next to my mother when she was a child. The picture was taken shortly before he died and in it he leaned on a cane with his right hand. I remember that I thought he looked more like her grandfather than her father.

"Yo granddaddy was a good man an dun took care o' his kin. Das right." Grandma keeps rocking as if in a trance. "Yo granddaddy use ta makes his own moonshine down yonda behin da chuch." She belly-laughs and looks so mischievous, the bare gums and deep lines disappear. "Whoop! Yessuh, he did. Yessush. Whoop! Een Josephine, that trollop, cuddun steal him way fro me. Nossuh. She don een know I know! Whoop!"

Grandma Bee is alive; her face a brown glove of laughter and tears. "Yall know yall Momma and Daddy didn't get married 'til after Catherine here was born, didjall?"

"What?!" I know she isn't saying what she's saying.

But I do know she's saying it. I don't know why it bothers me. I don't now why it relieves me.

"Whoop! Has! Yall sho dint. Yal shooo dint. Whoop!" She gets up with Margaret in her arms. "Come on, now. Befor it gits dark."

I wonder if she'll be able to carry my fifty-pound sister the rest of the way. Alex feels like cotton in arms. Walking in silence other than an occasional "whoop!" from Grandma, I think about Mom and Dad and our church back home. Do they approve of Mom and Dad's union? Do they know?

Seeing the dilapidated house, I realize that the cem-

etary path had been a shortcut. We could have used that all along. But I'm too tired to be angry, I'm just glad to be home.

Inside, Grandma asks that I fix her a "sugar tit" and I quickly put my hands over the mouths of my sister and brother to stop their comments of: "Oooh, Grandma said a bad word." Dropping my hands from their mouths and grabbing their elbows, I pull them into the kitchen and pull out a facecloth from the broken drawer. The drawer won't push all the way in and I remember our cabinets having been

remodeled with Corian—the most expensive—three months ago. I wet the cloth, and grabbing four sugar cubes from the clean glass jar near the sink, I place them on the wet towel. I wring it in my hands to get the sweetness going before I give it to Grandma.

She slurps on the sugar tit without shame. Alex and Margaret look on incredulously at what surely seems undignified. We have never seen anyone in our neighborhood sucking on a sugar tit at a dinner table, much less a couch in the living room.

"You remin me o' yo Momma, Catherine. Uh-huh. Yup. Yall needin be goin ya bed now a-ways. Slurp."

"Okay, Grandma." I carry Alexander to the bed he had to himself and tuck him in. The blankets that cover him, the blankets that he lay upon, the blankets that are folded up on the floor were all made by Grandma Bee. All of them are multi-colored, and Margaret and I had sometimes laughed about the loud or busy colors that were the subjects of her stitches. As I pull the covers over him, the thickness of the

Grandma Bee is  
alive; her face a  
brown glove of  
laughter and tears.

blanket strikes me. Mounds and mounds of cotton rest inside the seamless stitching. Ignoring the pattern, it rivals the highest of quality comforters at our favorite department store in Florida.

I kiss Alex and turn around quickly to check on Margaret, slipping on what I believe is a blanket, and I land squarely on my side. My pelvic bone throbs and I look for the spiteful blanket. Strangling the fabric, it isn't a blanket, but a pair of Grandma's pants that have fallen off the sewing table. I hold them up in all their expansive pink glory. The pants are wide in the hips—I recall being six years-old and telling my mother that she was fat and needed to lose weight. I took the cue from the conversations I'd overheard my father have with other men. Perhaps he would be less inclined to go out with other women if my mother was thinner. She took the advice and bought an exercise bicycle that she rode every day.

Soon, her hips were more slender than most of the women that Dad was friends with. Funny, but I never noticed whether Dad was home more or less after she lost the weight.

Shame pokes me in the heart and replaces the pain of my pelvic bone and I recognize the rotted floor has cushioned my fall.

In the living room Margaret is asleep in Grandma's arms. I pick her up and take her to the bed that she and I share. Grandma comes in and tells me to get in the bed. Climbing in the bed opposite Margaret, Grandma places over us a large blanket with colors of red, pink, brown, blue, white, and yellow in the shape of a star. Leaning over, she says, "I'm glad yo Momma and Daddy let yall come stay with yo old grandma." She kisses us on the cheek and a little

spittle rests on my forehead. She gets up awkwardly—her large frame not accommodating to the twisted position she was in—and turns out the lamp that had no lampshade. As she retreats, I think of the horse that had raised its head on cue. Smiling, I close my eyes for sleep, without wiping the saliva from my forehead.

Nicole A. Grant

"Use what talent you possess:  
the woods would  
be very silent  
if no birds  
sang  
except those  
that sang  
best."

- Henry Van Dyke

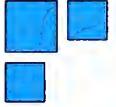


“Letting Go”

Suzel Suarez



Silver Gelatin Print



## P'an Ku Staff Page

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“Interiors”

Andres Puertes



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